

PRIESTS AND SEERS IN THE VEDAS,
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE EVOLUTION OF THE BRĀHMAN CLASS

Padma Misra

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of London

July 1965

ProQuest Number: 10672700

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10672700

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

ABSTRACT

This study traces the evolution of the Brāhmans as a sacerdotal caste during the Vedic period. An alternative view is offered to the generally accepted ideas about the Brāhmans based on the Smrtis. By presenting a semantic study of certain keywords for priest-poets in the Rgveda and by relying on a functional approach we hope to offer a more consistent interpretation of the development of the notion of Brahmanism. The factors that contributed to the development of the Vedic priesthood into the Brāhman class are traced to the fusion of the pre-Vedic Aryan and indigenous culture patterns and religious ideas.

Chapter I deals with the notion of caste and surveys certain historical approaches to it, in so far as they have influenced social studies of the Vedic period, and puts forward the need for a new approach on this subject. The literary sources for the Vedic period, the method of their interpretation and their chronology are discussed in chapter II. The third chapter outlines the pre-Vedic indigenous culture streams and deals with the migration of the Indo-Aryans into India. In addition it surveys the Aryan and the non-Aryan elements of the ensuing composite Vedic society. The four succeeding chapters analyse the words vipra, ṛsi, puróhita and brāhman. The conclusion sets out the issues involved in this study.

- HSI - Hindu Society an Interpretation by Karve, Iravati
 HSL - History of Sanskrit Literature by Macdonell, A.A.
 Ind.St - Indische Studien ed. Weber, A.
 IA - Indian Antiquary, Bombay
 Ind.Civ- Indus Civilization by Wheeler, M.
 J.Asiat. - Journal Asiatique et Publié par la Société Asiatique, Paris
 JAOS - Journal of the American Oriental Society, New Haven,
 Connecticut
 JB - Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa
 JBBRAS - Journal of the Bombay Branch of Royal Asiatic Society
 JRAI - Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great
 Britain and Ireland
 JRAS - Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and
 Ireland
 Kauṣ Up- Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad
 KātŚS - Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra
 KB - Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa
 KāpS - Kāpiṣṭhala-Kaṭha-Saṃhitā
 KS - Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā
 LātŚS - Lāṭyāyana Śrauta Sūtra
 MASI - Memoirs of the Archeological Survey of India
 MatP - Matsya Purāṇa
 Mbh - Mahābhārata
 MS - Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā
 NLMAE - New Light on the Most Ancient East by Childe, V.G.
 NB - Notes on Brahman by Gonda, J.
 OST - Original Sanskrit Texts by Muir, J.
 Pā - Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini
 PB - Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
 PHI - Pre-historic India by Piggott, S.
 RAI - Religions of Ancient India by Renou, L.
 RPVU - Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas by Keith, A.B.
 Rām - Rāmāyāṇa of Vālmīki
 RV - Ṛgveda

- SAIC - Some Aspects of the Ancient Indian Culture by Bhandarkar, D.R.
 ŚānSS - Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra
 ŚB - Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
 SBE - Sacred Books of the East ed. Muller, F.Max
 SL - Sanskrit Language by Burrow, T.
 SV - Sāmaveda
 TĀ - Taittirīya Āraṇyaka
 TB - Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa
 TS - Taittirīya Saṃhitā
 Ved.Ind- Vedic Index by Keith, A.B. and Macdonell, A.A.
 Ved.St - Vedische Studien by Pischel, R. and Geldner, K.F.
 ViṣP - Viṣṇu Purāṇa
 WZKM - Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, Vienna
 WR - Wörterbuch zum Rigveda
 Yāj - Yājñavalkya Smṛti
 YV - Yajurveda
 ZDMG - Zeitschrift der Deutsche Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft

	<u>Page</u>
Acknowledgments	3
Abbreviations	4-6
Chapter I Introduction	8-37
Chapter II Sources	38-76
Chapter III Vedic Society	77-128
Chapter IV Study of the term <u>vīpra</u>	129-169
Chapter V Study of the term <u>ṛsi</u> ..	170-191
Chapter VI Study of the term <u>puróhita</u>	192-248
Chapter VII Study of the term <u>bráhmaṇ</u>	249-311
Conclusion	312-316
Bibliography	317-335

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Priesthood is as old as the human need to propitiate or control supernatural forces. Priests, magicians or in fact anyone who could act as a mediator between men and the unseen forces, belonged to this profession. As a social class, it was probably the first to differentiate itself from the masses. Consequently it acquired more specific traits than any other social group.

The priesthood in India is identified with the Brāhmans, who claim the pre-eminence over the classes, many privileges, and the right to perform priestly functions as their prerogative. Ever since the Brāhmans emerged as the supreme and the inviolable class, they have kept their hold on priestly activities, intellectual pursuits and above all, on the society itself, irrespective of political upheavals or religious reforms.

The Brāhmans on account of their solidarity and privileged position have been noted by foreigners from the second century onwards, as a striking feature of Indian society.¹ Their importance is also evident from the description of India as the

¹ The philosophers of Megasthenes no doubt included Brāhmans (Strabo XV.i.39). The earliest occurrence of the word brāhman in a western source is apparently Porphyry (De Abstinētia IV.16), who quoted the 2nd century Christian author Bardesanes. Quoted in The Classical Accounts of India ed. R.C.Majumdar, Calcutta, 1960, p.425.

country of the Brāhmanas.¹ In the modern age their claims for importance and supremacy are substantiated by the word Brahmanism apparently coined to imply everything that gives the Brāhmanas their special position.² The word Brahmanism primarily denoted the Vedic beliefs shaped by the Brāhmanas, and is also applied to that form of Hinduism which accepts the importance of the Vedas and the pre-eminence of the Brāhmanas.³

As the Brāhmanas, on account of their extensive influence, are considered a distinguishing feature of Hindu society, their description in connection with practically every aspect of Hindu India is inevitable. But they are mostly discussed in connection with the social, economic or religious problems of the country.

Historical studies generally discuss them with reference to their political influence and to the caste system with its effect on society. Works predominantly concerned with the problem of caste and its evolution discuss the role of the Brāhmanas as a caste in

¹ Hsüan Tsang refers to the Brāhmanas as the purest of Indians and held in high esteem; the name 'Brāhmaṇa country' attributed to their excellent reputation probably refers to Brahmāvarta, T.Watters - On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, A.D.629-645, Delhi, 1961, I, p.140.

² cf. Fick, R. - The Social Organisation in North-East India in Buddha's Time, p.14.

³ cf. Weber, M. - The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism, tr. and ed. Hans H. Girth and Don Martindales, Illinois, 1958; Zaehner, R.C. - Hinduism, p.7; Parrinder, E.G.S. - An Introduction to Asian Religions, London 1957, pp.31,34.

greater detail. Most of these works follow a traditional approach, which was formulated when social studies in India were initiated. A study of the Brāhmins themselves is very rare.¹

New evidence on North West India, the region of much cultural and racial amalgamation in the early ages, and also the recent theoretical formulations and field studies of the sociologists and the social anthropologists call for a reorientation of the study of the Vedic society and of the way in which the Brāhmin class developed to assume its later identity.

A sacerdotal class with such pretentious claims is not found in any country except India. Priesthood in many ancient civilizations had the tendency to become hereditary but did not become exclusive to any particular group. Besides, it did not lead to the formation of a class with such extravagant claims to privileges anywhere else.²

¹ Balakrishna N.Nair discusses the various techniques of social control employed from the earliest times by the Brāhmins in his book The Dynamic Brahmin: a Brahmino-centric Analysis of Indian Culture, Bombay, 1959.

² The state exercised considerable control over the priests in Babylon (ERE., p.286), Egypt (ERE, p.293), Greece (ERE, p.302), and Rome (ERE, p.325-6) through the administrative head. The Hebrews had a priesthood somewhat similar to that of the Indians as the Levites among them claimed the prerogative of acting as priests (ERE, p.308). The Hebrew priest was born not made, according to the Mosaic code (ibid., p.322). Iranian priesthood presents the nearest parallel, as priestly families with hereditary transmission of correct ritual and invocation existed in pre-Zarathushtrian times. The Avesta puts the priests at the top in the enumeration of the three classes, and the Magi were the recognized priestly order in Western Iran, (ERE, pp.319-21).

These characteristics of the ancient Indian priesthood, combined with its restrictions and taboos, have aroused interest and curiosity in the western world, that led to favourable, moderate and violently adverse criticism.¹ Throughout its history the Brāhman class has been subjected to severe censure, serious warnings and compelling challenges by foreigners, heterodox sects and at times by the Brāhmans themselves.² It has also provided a wide range for the free play of the fancy of many scholars, who have put forward ingenious and often contradictory theories about the origin of the Brāhmans.³

Before tracing the origin of the Brāhmans, an outline of earlier studies is given to show how the traditional approach had developed. Though there was a long tradition of observation and reflection on

¹ Brāhmans' claim to antiquity, purity of race and a monopoly of philosophical thought impressed the early writers; for criticism see Garbe, R. - The Philosophy of Ancient India, Chicago, 1899, pp.58-85.

² Brāhmans appear to have embraced Buddhism and joined orthodox sects in fairly large numbers.

³ Pargiter considers Kṣatriyas to be Aryans who adopted and Aryanised the non-Aryan Brāhmanism, Pargiter, F.E. - Anct. Ind. Hist. Tradition, pp.293,297,306ff.; Slater and Kosambi take Brahmanism as Dravidian, Slater, G. - The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture, London, 1924, p.158; Kosambi, D.D. - 'Early Stages of Caste System in Northern India' in JBBRAS, NS 22, 1946. pp.33-48; 'Early Brāhmans and Brāhmanism' in JBBRAS, NS 23, 1947, pp.39-46; An Introduction to the Study of Indian History, p.96; According to Chanda and Ghose, the Brāhmans mostly represent the ṛṣi clans and the Kṣatriyas the indigenous rulers; Chanda, R.P. - MAI, 41, 1929, pp.10 ff.; Ghose, N.N. - The Indo-Aryan language and Culture Origins, pp.28-52.

social problems in Indian religious circles, efforts to analyse Hindu society were first initiated towards the close of the eighteenth century.¹ The interest of the British rulers prompted a desire to know the customs and the law of the people to be governed,² and the interest of the Indians in their social institutions was directed by the desire to reform social evils.³

The British and the Indian approach depended mainly on the Smṛti literature, and hence resulted in giving an exaggerated image of the Brāhman class.⁴ This literature, composed and preserved by the Brāhmins, was the main source for the socio-religious aspect of caste and its ramifications. The Brāhmins naturally upheld their own importance and cleverly distorted the real picture to support

¹ Halhed, N.B. - A Code of Gentoo Laws, London, 1776 (being the tr. of Vivādārṇavasetu); Sir William Jones - Institutes of Hindu Law or the Ordinances of Menu, Calcutta, 1794; Colebrooke, H.T. - 'The Enumeration of Indian Classes in Miscellaneous Essays, London, 1873, III, pp.157-170.

² cf. Halhed - *ibid.*, p.IX; Feiling, K.G. - Warren Hastings, London, 1954, p.236.

³ For abolition of Sati, see - The English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy, ed. Jogendra Chunder Ghose, Calcutta, 1901, II, pp.123-192. (This article was first published in 1820); for prohibition of child marriage - Collected Works of Sir R.G.Bhandarkar, ed. N.B.Utgikar, Poona, 1928, II, pp.538-602 (pamphlet first appeared in 1891).

⁴ The History of Hindostan, tr. from Persian by Alexander Dow, London, 1812, I, p.XX ff.; Mill, James - History of British India, London, 1820, I, pp.144, 156 ff.; Elphinstone, M. - The History of India, London, 1841, I, pp.103-4.

their claims to a superior and privileged position. They were supreme in religious matters and had become the most literate class as sole custodians of sacred knowledge. They were thus able to monopolize important posts, which enabled them to play a vital rôle in social and political matters.

When the social studies were initiated the eminent position of the Brāhmans was no longer checked by Hindu political authority. The Indian and the Western scholars thus got the impression that the Brāhmans had always enjoyed such influence. These conditions therefore supported the Brāhmans' claim laid down in the literary sources.

Hindu thinkers and scholars, influenced by Western thought and, realising the necessity to reform some of the prevailing outrageous social evils, directed their attention to the study of social institutions. The reformers soon realised that, as the social practices were backed by religious belief, a reformed practice had to be in consonance with the traditional religious custom if it were to be accepted. This realisation led to the ransacking of the Smrtis. The centre of attention then shifted from the social injustices to the system of caste which was generally held responsible for perpetuating them, and was also considered the main

cause of the great gulf between the classes.¹

The studies of the Hindus on caste and other social institutions were further prompted by the desire to present their social divisions in a favourable light to the West. This led to the tendency to compare these with the rigid social classes of other countries in order to show that social stratification was not peculiar to India.² Another trend was to review the old institutions in order to prove their adequacy and utility in the present age.³

The literary sources at this stage mainly consisted of the various Smrtis, their commentaries and the Purāṇas.⁴ The professed motive of this literature is to regulate the society in its civil, religious and moral aspects according to Hindu ideas of human existence, its purpose and aspirations. The guiding principle of human life was taken to be dharma, and the social institutions were

¹ Bhandarkar, R.G. - 'The Indian Caste System' in Collected Works of Sir R.G. Bhandarkar, II, pp. 471 ff.; Chintamani, C.Y. (ed.) - The Indian Social Reform, 1901; Swamī Dayānanda Saraswatī - Satyārtha Prakāśa, Ajmer, 1909, samullāsa III, pp. 39, 73-4; IV, pp. 113-122.

² Senart, E., Caste in India pp. 12-13; Ghurye, G.S., Caste and class in India, pp. 143-164.

³ Ketkar, S.V., An Essay on Hinduism its formation and future, Ithaca N.Y., 1909, Radhakrishnan's forward to Hindu Social Institutions by P.H. Valavalkar; cf. ibid p. 333.

⁴ Varna-dharma referred to in Agni chap. 151; Bhāg, VII, 11; XI, 17; Brāhma, 114-115; Mārkaṇḍeya, chap. 25; Viṣṇu, III, 8; mixed castes are enumerated in Brāhma-vaiivarta, Bṛ. Khaṇḍa, 10.

regarded as the means of acquiring this dharma.¹

The inherent idea in this literature is that the dharma or the duty to be followed should be in accordance with the dharma the natural or inborn attribute.² This implied that the duties conducive to the maximum happiness of groups or individuals should be in keeping with their social status. The Smṛti literature therefore devised more or less uniform rules for a stratified society theoretically divided into four classes. It accepted the social classes as divinely ordained,³ and depicted the society as ideal, eternal and static. The numerous existing castes, which could hardly be ignored, were explained as the result of the intermingling of the different varṇas.⁴ Hence theoretically at least, the Smṛtis tried to maintain the unchanging nature of Hindu society and its system of caste.

Occasional statements that dharma differs in each epoch, provided a loophole in the seemingly static framework of theory to

¹ Valavalkar - Hindu Social Institutions, prologue, pp.3 ff, 95 ff.

² cf. Gītā - III.35; XVIII.41 ff; Kauṭilya - Arthaśāstra, I.3; Renou, L. - RAI, p.48; Karve, I. - HSI, pp.93-5.

³ This may be taken to imply the supposed antiquity of social stratification. cf. Manu, I.31 ff.; Yāj, I.10.

⁴ Manu, 10.6 ff.; Yāj, I.91 ff.

meet the demands of a changing society.¹ Acceptance of tradition and established customs as one of the criteria of dharma,² or the accepted duty of every man, made it easy to recognize the changes without violating the general belief in the antiquity of the social stratification and its accompanying rules.

The incorporation of new traditions and customs could not be avoided when new groups were assimilated into the main stream of the society. Modifications and new interpretations of old rules led to various commentaries, new Smrtis and digests,³ which tried to uphold the fiction that every custom was ancient and sanctioned by Śruti.⁴

¹ Manu, I.85; Parāśara Smṛ. I.24, lays down the priority of the Smrtis to be followed in different epochs.

² Manu, II.42; Yāj. I.7; Āp.DS. I.1.1; I.2.3; cf. I.7.2; I.6.7; Mbh. attaches more importance to ācāra, Vana, 150.28; Gaut. DS. I.9.62; Āś.GS. I.5.1.

³ Kātyāyana Smṛti was written as a supplement to Gobhila, Kāt.Sm.V; Devala was compiled to cope with a new situation, Devala - V. 1-3; Dāyabhāga was meant for Bengal, Altekar, A.S. - Sources of Hindu Dharma, p.19. Old customs were either modified by recommending avoidance of old practices in the Kali Age, or by ingenious interpretations and by interpreting texts to settle the conflicting questions like niyoga and widow remarriage according to the changed view point of the society. cf. Kullūka on Manu, IX, 187, right of inheritance of widows; Mitākṣarā on Yāj. II.117, tasmād viśamo vibhāgaḥ śāstra-dr̥stopi loka-virodhāt-chrutivirodhāt-ca nānuṣṭheyah.

⁴ The Supreme authority of the Smrtis, regarding dharma, proclaimed by the earlier writers (Āp.DS. I.1.2-3; Gaut.DS. I.1.1-2) became a kind of legal fiction in view of the sanction of new practices ignoring the Vedic usage, Altekar - ibid. pp.15ff.

In spite of the increasing rigidity of the castes, a recollection of the earlier phase of society, when the frontiers between the classes were not so clearly marked, seems to have lingered in some streams of tradition. Thus the hierarchical division based on birth is taken for granted, but the question of the relative importance of birth and conduct is occasionally raised.¹

The Smṛti literature though valuable for the study of social institutions cannot give an unbiased and accurate idea of their actual state, as it is mainly concerned with an ideal society. Complete reliance on this literature² and a limited knowledge of the actual conditions in the society, resulted in certain fixed notions about the Brāhmans, their functions and their importance.³ The pretensions of the Brāhmans, emphatically repeated in their writings, are supported by the early historians⁴ and the Indologists,⁵ who were content to accept the influence of the

¹ Manu - X.57-58,66 ff.

² cf. Ketkar, S.V. - The History of Caste in India (based on the evidence from Manu); for criticism of such reliance, cf. Bhandarkar, D.R. - SAIC, pp.9,19.

³ Ved.Ind., II,pp.90-2,251 ff.

⁴ See above, p.12.n4.

⁵ cf. Müller, F. Max - HASL, pp.11-2,76-8; Weber, A. - HIL, pp.18-9.

Brāhmins in moulding Hindu society.¹ The Brāhmins were credited with a very significant contribution towards the origin of the caste system - the cornerstone of Hinduism.² It seems to be implicitly assumed in earlier works that the Brāhmins were not only above and beyond the influence of the factors normally responsible for social and cultural change, but also that they guided these factors in such a way as to transform the society to their greatest advantage.³

Such ideas had become very firm and influenced the study of vedic society. Scholars, both Western and Indian, turned more and more to the Vedic and the Sūtra literature, as it became easily accessible⁴ to trace the origin, development and the religious backing of the stratified society.⁵ The tendency to study Hindu

¹ The history of Hinduism is the conquest of the Aryan and the non-Aryan tribes by the Brāhmins, Ved. Ind., II, p.92.

² Caste is regarded as an ingenious device of the Brāhmins, Dubois, J.A. - A Description of the People of India, London, 1817.

³ The office of the purohita is said to have been instrumental in strengthening the position of the Brāhmins, Roth, R. - Zur Litteratur und Geschichte des Weda, pp.117 ff.; Zimmer, H. - AL, pp.168-9, 196 ff.; Frazer, R.W. - A Literary History of India, London, 1898, p.27 ff (1920 ed.); cf. Baines, A. - Ethnography pp.3-4.

⁴ Colebrooke - 'On the Vedas, or Sacred Writings of the Hindus', Calcutta, 1805, in Miscellaneous Essays, I, pp.8-102; F. Rosen - Rigveda Samhitā, London, 1838; The Rgveda with Sāyanas commentary was published by Max Muller, 1849-1874; Th. Aufrecht brought out another edition in Indische Studien, VI-VII, 1861-1863.

⁵ Origin of the four varnas on the basis of the Vedic literature, the Epics and the Purānas, Muir, J. - OST, I; an important study of the caste on the basis of the Brāhmanas and the Sūtras, Weber, A. - Ind.St., X, pp.I-160; Social and military position of the Kṣatriyas as represented in the Epics, Hopkins, E.W. - JAOS, 13, 1889, pp.257-372.

society in terms of the four varnas resulted in efforts to prove or disprove the existence of caste and its various sub-divisions in the early Vedic literature, especially in the Rgveda.¹

All subsequent discussions continue to centre round the problem of the existence of caste, with its privileges and disadvantages, in the Vedic age.² The generally accepted conclusion is that caste is a progressive system and much of the basic structure on which the later elaborate system is based was already in existence in the Rgvedic age.³

These ideas began to be modified by the increasing knowledge of the pre-Vedic period, the widening acquaintance with the non-Brahmanical traditions⁴ and the information ~~was~~ made available by regional studies of different aspects and factors of

¹ Haug, M. - Brahma und die Brahmanen, 1871; Caste disproved in the Rgveda, Zimmer, H. - AL, pp. 185-203; view opposed by Geldner, K. F. - Ved. St., p. 146; Oldenberg M. - Rel. des veda p. 373.

² Nothing to imply that the Brāhmanas constitute an exclusive caste, Muir - OST, I, pp. 263-4, 280; Brāhmanas are already a caste in RV, Ved. Ind., II, p. 81; Institution of caste or classes had taken deep root in Aryan society in the Rgvedic Age, Apte, V. M. - Ved. Age, pp. 449-450.

³ Keith, A. B. - CHI, p. 94; Beni Prasad - The State in Anct. Ind. pp. 19-20.

⁴ The evidence of the Buddhist literature and the Epics shows that the supremacy of the Brāhmanas was more a fiction than a fact. The popular tales incorporated in the Brāhman-redacted Mahābhārata imply that the essence of the dharma was believed to be known to the lowliest to whom the proud Brāhman was sent to learn it. cf. the story of Dharma-vyādha and the Brāhman, Mbh., Vana, 207, 30-39; Ved. In., II, p. 257; claims of Brāhman superiority are precarious, Karve - HSI, p. 42.

caste.¹ The shift in outlook is apparent in the views expressed on this subject by the earlier and the later historians of this century. While Rapson regards caste as essentially Brahmanical,² Basham describes it as a progressive development from the association of different racial and other groups in a single cultural system.³ These different outlooks make it necessary to evaluate the Brāhmans, their position and role in society in the light of the new theories and evidence.

Caste, a socio-religious system, and the Brāhmans, who claim religion to be their exclusive domain, have become very closely associated. The link, forged by the sacred literature, was further strengthened by early European scholars, who considered caste to be an artificial creation devised and perfected by a clever priesthood.⁴

¹ Kapadia, K.M., - Hindu Kinship, Bombay, 1947; Srinivas, M.N. - Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India, Oxford, 1952; Karve, I. - Kinship Organization in India, Poona, 1953; Stevenson, H.N.C. - Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System in JRAI, 84, 1954; Mayer, A.C. Caste and Kinship in Central India, London, 1960; Leach, E.R. (ed.) Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and N.W. Pakistan, Cambridge, 1960.

² Rapson, E.J. - CHI., I, p.53.

³ Basham, A.L. - The Wonder that was India, p.148.

⁴ See above, pp 17-18

A brief survey of the various analyses of caste would therefore help in clarifying the position of the Brāhmans as an important class and their role in society. The general theories about the origin of caste are applicable to the Brāhmans for their existence as a caste is presupposed by the theories that stress the rôle of the priests in the origin and development of this unique and complex system.

Some of the prominent features of caste are taboos on commensality accompanied by the idea of purity and pollution, restriction on marriage according to the rules of endogamy, the association of particular occupations with certain castes ~~and~~ and a hierarchical grading of castes in the social scale. Theorists have tried to explain ~~and~~ the caste system by tracing the development of some of those features, which they consider to be more significant.

Ibbetson,¹ while admitting that many factors like tribal origin, functional guilds and religious monopolies had contributed towards this system, laid great emphasis on the exploitation of the advantageous and influential position of the Brāhman caste. He concluded that the Brāhmans caused all occupations except their own and those of their patrons, the ruling class, to be considered degraded.

¹ Ibbetson, D., - Panjab Castes Lahore, 1916; A reprint of the chapter on The Races, Castes and Tribes of the People, in the Report on the Census of the Panjab, published in 1883 by the late Sir Denzil Ibbetson.

Nesfield based his theory on the essential unity of the race and considered occupation to be the main contributory factor.¹ Senart² realized that distinctions of race and function were not enough in themselves to bring this complex system into being, and to develop the lasting prejudices that accompany the distinctions of caste. He traced the restrictions of commensality to the family worship or the family meal of the earliest clans. He also stated that the influx of the Aryans resulted in a two-fold purity, of descent and of occupation. New groups were formed on the basis of these new concepts of purity. The priestly class alone maintained its solidarity, and used its moral power to establish the caste system, interpreting it in terms of the traditional four classes.

Risley thinks that the caste system owes its origin to differences in colour, which encouraged hypergamy.³ These theories

¹ Nesfield, J.C. - Brief View of the Caste System of the North-West Provinces and Oudh. Albahabad, 1885; he is supported to some extent by J. Dahlmann, who traces the development of castes from corporations, and the latter from the Vedic classes, Das Altindische Volkstum und seine Bedeutung für die Gesellschaftskunde, Köln, 1899.

² Senart, E. - Les castes dans l'Inde, Paris, 1896, Eng. tr. Caste in India, 1930.

³ Risley, H.H. - The People of India, Calcutta, 1915.

concentrate only on some of the characteristics of caste and thus fail to explain the system in its totality. Occupation, race and hypergamy are usually emphasised as factors in the development of the system of caste. Scholars generally take up one or two of these concepts and elaborate on them.¹ Thus Ghurye admits the importance of racial differences, but stresses the factor of priestly manipulation.² He also thinks that the Brāhmins evolved the system in order to preserve the purity of the Aryan race.

The racial and functional theories confine their investigations into the causes of the system of caste to the tribes of the conquering Aryans, who were confronted by a vanquished population both ethnically and culturally different. Priestly manipulation³ is a major factor in these theories. The emphasis on endogamy, purity and pollution as factors of caste formation marks a

¹ Blunt partially accepts the occupational theory and partly follows Risley, Blunt, E.A.H. - Report on the Census of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Allahabad, 1912, p.323. (XV, pt.I, of the Census of India, 1911). Chanda traces caste to race and function, Chanda, R. - The Indo-Aryan Races, Rajshahi, 1916, p.36; Hocart takes caste in a very loose sense and explains the four varnas as primarily devised for ritualistic purposes, Hocart, A.M. - Caste: a comparative Study, London, 1950.

² Ghurye, G.G.S. - Caste and Class in India, pp.165-183.

³ Beni Prasad - State in Anct. India, p.13.

significant departure from these theories by looking beyond the Aryan tribes for the origin of caste. Oldenberg had in fact pointed out earlier that restrictions on marriage and commensality are more likely to have originated among the pre-Aryans.¹ Caste, according to him, arose from class, guild and tribe segregated into permanently separate groups by heredity, restrictions on marriage and commensality, and by a fear of pollution derived partly from the Aryan and partly from the pre-Aryan inhabitants.² He considered the later orthodox account of mixed races to be a fiction invented for admitting the indigenous tribes, the despised sections of the Aryans and the functional groups. The transition from class to caste was completed when a man remained a member of his original group irrespective of his profession.

¹ Oldenberg, H. - 'Zur Geschichte des indischen Kastenwesens' in ZDMG, 51, pt. 2, 1897.

² Murphy infers from the ruins of the Great Bath and provisions for washing in Indus Civilization, that the people attached importance to ablution and emphasized ceremonial purity, Murphy, J. - Lamps of Anthropology, Manchester, 1943, pp. 120, 127. Ketkar stresses the fear of pollution as the main factor of caste, Ketkar, S.V. - The History of Caste, p. 121, cf. pp. 28 ff.; Ghurye (Caste and Race in India, p. 144) and Roy recognize the idea of ceremonial purity for the development of caste system, but consider it as inherently associated with the Aryans, Roy, S.C. - 'Caste, Race and Religion' in Man in India, 14, no. 2, p. 85; In Gujarat Caste taboos become more strict as one goes down in the social scale, Hutton, J.H. - CI, p. 188,

The suggestion that some of the contributory factors of caste may be traced to pre-Aryan culture raised the importance of the idea of taboo, mana and the primitive concept of soul in contributing to the formation of caste.¹ It is now generally believed that the idea of endogamy and the power of food to transmit qualities had developed among pre-Aryans, and resulted in a social order of endogamous occupational classes.² The impact of Aryan culture strengthened the tendency to associate difference in colour with difference of caste, and to place castes in a scale of social precedence.³

Hutton suggests a complex origin for this complicated system, and explains it as the natural result of the interaction of a number of factors - geographical, social, political, economic and religious. These factors ~~were~~ did not occur in conjunction in any other region, hence caste developed as an exclusively Indian

¹ Rice, S. - 'The Origin of Caste' in The Asiatic Review, 25, 1929; Hindu Customs and their Origins, London 1937; Bonnerjea explains caste as due to the belief in magic, with which he credits both the Aryans and the non-Aryans, Bonnerjea, B. - 'Possible Origin of the Caste System in India' in IA, March, April, May, 1931; the idea of life matter and connected taboos is common to the whole of South East Asia, Australia and New Zealand, Hutton, J.H. - CI, 186.

² Dutt, N.K. - OGC, p.28.

³ Hutton - CI, p.189.

phenomenon. He cites a list, which he considers far from exhaustive, of fifteen of the more obvious factors that contributed to the emergence of caste system.¹ Some of these factors, like occupational segregation, totemism, mana, ideas about life-matter and belief in the transmission of qualities through food, are found in tribes least affected by civilization.² The clash of antagonistic cultures and races, colour prejudice, conquest and exploitation by a highly intelligent hierarchy have also ~~much~~ contributed ~~very~~ to ~~very~~ give the system its present form. He concludes that the social and political impact of the Aryans, with their definitely graded classes, was in all probability responsible for introducing the principle of social precedence into a society already divided in groups isolated by taboos.³

The theory of the complex origin of the caste system stressing

¹ Hutton - CI, pp.190-191.

² Hutton - CI, pp.184-7; These ideas were probably shared by the Indo-Europeans, ibid., p.189; for the ceremonies of purification followed by the Parsi priests, cf. Roy, S.C. - 'Caste, Race and Religion' in Man in India, 14,no.2,p.177.

³ cf. R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Raychaudhuri and K. Datta - An Advanced History of India, London, 1948,p.33. Karve - HSI,pp.57-8.

the contribution of primitive concepts towards its emergence has not fully succeeded in replacing the generally accepted explanation of caste on the basis of racial purity and hypergamy. Apte, in his description of society during the three successive periods of the Vedic Age,¹ suggests that caste distinctions originated in religious circles.² He does not refer to the influence of non-Aryan factors in the origin of the caste system, but traces its beginning to the broad fourfold classification of society in the Rgvedic age.³

The general impression appears to persist that caste owes its origin to the colour-conscious Aryans.⁴ They are supposed to have taken wives at first from the conquered dark races, but later to have discontinued the practice. It is also suggested that manual occupations began to be considered degrading as a result of labour being easily supplied by the vanquished population.⁵

The elements on which the later structure of caste is based are

¹ Apte - Ved.Age, pp.384 ff., 449 ff., 507 ff.

² ibid., pp.509-510.

³ ibid., pp.449-50.

⁴ The word varna used for the classes is generally taken to support this idea. Cf. Ved.Ind, II, p.267; Basham - The Wonder That Was India, p.34-5.

⁵ Dutt - OGC, p.84.

taken to be present in the Rgveda. The four classes are said to have crystalized and become rigid during the period of the later Samhitās and the Brāhmanas¹ and the system is believed to have assumed its present form in the Madhyadeśa; the stronghold of Vedism, and to have spread from that centre with the Brāhmanas.²

The growing exclusiveness of the three classes of the early Vedic society, which are similar to those in other early Indo-European communities,³ is attributed to the influence of the Brāhmanas.⁴ They are supposed to have laid down rules against intermarriage and interdining to maintain the ritual purity of their class.⁵ The remaining two classes are said to have followed the example of the Brāhmanas and raised barriers between each other.⁶

¹ Keith - CHI, I, pp.93-4; System developed towards the end of the Vedic period, Collected Works of Sir R.G.Bhandarkar, II, p.511; S.K.Belvalkar and R.D.Ranade - History of Indian Philosophy, Poona, 1927, II, p.14.

² Rapson - CHI, I, pp.53-5.

³ Keith - CHI, I, p.125.

⁴ Baines - Ethnography, p.17.

⁵ They are said to have elaborated the ritual, which led to the growth and consolidation of the caste system, Macdonell, A.A. - HSL, p.184.

⁶ Dutt - OGC, pp.85-6.

The racial theory does not explain the process by which discriminations arising from the ethnic difference between the Aryans and the Śūdras permeated Aryan society. The fusion of white conquerors and vanquished dark races is not a rare phenomenon confined to India, but colour prejudice and racial exclusiveness did not result in the formation of such rigid and mutually exclusive castes anywhere else, either in the ancient or the modern world.¹ These certainly were important contributory factors in the development of caste in its present form but they could not have led to the emergence of the system by themselves. The logical consequence of the efforts to preserve the purity of race would have been two varnas and not a fourfold division,² much less a society fragmented into three thousand sections.

The importance attached to priestly manipulation and the influence of the principles of Hindu philosophy in the emergence of *of the complicated system of caste indicate the early existence of* some of its essential features. Priestly interference could be acceptable and effective only if some of the essential factors of the system were already in existence, and would thus predispose the

¹ Position of Negroes in South Africa and in the United States of America cannot be regarded as a parallel, for their employment does not lead to pollution.

² The phrase ubhau varnau occurs only once in RV-I.179.6.

population to accept an extension of these.¹ Philosophical speculations are more likely to have contributed towards the sublimation of the system than to its primary origin. Political and economic considerations generally play as important a part as religious or superstitious ideas in shaping human institutions. Sublimation comes at a later stage when the result is realised to be far from ideal.²

The main difficulty in an objective study of the Brāhman̄s and the caste is that these are living institutions. Hindu society, though a little more flexible now, was quite rigid till a few decades ago. The gulf between the Brāhman̄s and the non-Brāhman̄s was so wide and insurmountable³ that it was practically impossible to imagine the society to have ever been free from such barriers. Any discussion of early Vedic society was therefore based on the assumption of the existence of the four classes in some form or other.⁴

Typical of the tendency to project our notions of the familiar society on the ancient scene is the search for the classes not as

¹ Baines - Ethnography, p.16.

² Hutton - CI, p.175; Karve - HSI, pp.79,103.

³ Especially to the south of the Vindhya; In the North, the Śūdras are distinguished from the three upper classes. Among the latter, the claim of social eminence of the Brāhman̄s is challenged by the Kāyasthas and the Rājapūts.

⁴ see above, pp 18-19 : class is generally confused with caste in these discussions.

they probably were, but as castes distinguished by their later characteristics. This becomes clear from statements such as 'normally the poetical function is Brāhmanical',¹ or the discussions about the probable date when the Brāhman became a closed caste,² or about the possibility of a Kṣatriya or a Vaiśya officiating at a sacrifice.³ Similarly arguments about the right of the Śūdras to study the Vedas, or to take part in the Vedic ritual imply that the division of society into four classes in the early period is accepted as a foregone conclusion. Thus, the question about the origin or development of the castes in the Vedas is raised, but the discussion implies acceptance of the existence of different castes in the earliest texts.⁴

¹ Ved.Ind, I,116.

² This is attributed to the elaboration of the ritual by the priestly class, cf. Keith - CHI,I,p.93; Eggeling - SBE,XII,p.XV.

³ Ved.Ind,II,249; This attitude is reflected in discussions whether Kṣatriyo brahma bhūtvā yajñam upāvartate, AB,VII,19, implies change of caste or indicates that a Kṣatriya could officiate under certain circumstances; cf. the controversy centring round Devāpi and Viśvāmitra and references to promotion from the Kṣatriya rank, Dutt - OGC,p.47 ff.; for the promotion of a Vaiśya to the Brāhmaṇ rank, Keith - CHI,I,p.127.

⁴ An illustration of such an attitude is V.M.Apte's discussion, 'Were Castes Formulated in the Age of the Rgveda?' in BDCRI, II, 1940-41, pp.34-49.

The Preoccupation with questions like the possibility of a Ksatirya or a non-Brāhman acting as a priest imply the formation of the Brāhmins as a caste and their exclusive claim to certain functions.¹ It tends to overlook the important fact that the Rgvedic priesthood was highly developed, required special learning and pre-supposed long training. These factors usually make a priesthood hereditary. This does not exclude the possibility of the son of a non-priest joining the priestly profession. But whoever decided to join, by the time he had acquired the necessary knowledge and training, would be known by one of the many designations that denoted a priest.² Some at least among his children would follow his profession, thus leading to the establishment of a new priestly family.³

Similarly it is not improbable that some of the members of the hereditary priestly families took up non-priestly occupations.⁴

¹ RV IX.112 and AB I.16 are often quoted to prove that members of a priestly family could follow diverse occupations, and that non-Brāhmins could act as priests.

² Terms like vipra and rsi, used for the priests in the Rgveda, are functional designations and do not denote the priestly caste, see below, pp.167-8, 170, 190

³ The Brahmanical gotras, whom tradition ascribes a Kṣatriya progenitor, would appear to have arisen in this manner. It appears quite probable that the Kṣatriyas and the commoners were members of the same clans as the Brāhmins, Brough, J.-'The Early History of the Gotras' in JRAS, 1947, p.84; the same - EBSG, p.XV.

⁴ Ved.Ind., II, pp.90-1; In spite of occupational exclusiveness, the Brāhmins who followed prohibited professions are mentioned in the Epics, the Jātakas and the Purānas. Such Brāhmins retain their caste affiliations, while members of the earlier priestly families would appear to have merged in the occupational group they joined. cf. the Brahma-kṣatras mentioned in the Purānas and the inscriptions.

Those following similar functions would appear to have been grouped under a general functional designation that gradually became fixed to denote a varna. The tribal structure of the Aryan Society also supports this suggestion, as the original functional groups later known as the Brāhmans, the Ksatriyas and the viś were most probably members of the same clan. The transformation of the functional groups into inflexible caste groups would appear to have been completed, when the persons following different occupations retained their caste affiliations based on birth. This would raise the importance of the caste membership over that of the functional group. The importance of family and kinship must have facilitated the hardening of classes into castes.

As long as birth did not become the sole criterion of joining a functional group and the classes did not crystallize, the question of such functionaries being Brāhmans or Ksatriyas could not arise. They were probably known as members of a particular family or by their functional designation. When the terms Brāhman and Ksatriya become current for the classes, the memory of their earlier associations marks Viśvāmitra and others as belonging to the one or the other. As far as the evidence from the Rgveda is concerned Viśvāmitra and Grtsamada are as much priests, vipras or rsis as any of the ārseya rsis with long genealogical trees.¹ As a result of the

¹ Viśvāmitra is later called a king, PB - XXI.2.2; and a prince, AB - VII.17.

preoccupation with discussing Hindu society in terms of the four varnas and the superiority of the Brāhmans, the usual method of studying the Vedic classes in the Rgveda is to identify them by the functions and the restrictions later associated with them. The Vedic and the non-Vedic cultures that are discussed in this connection are generally treated as two separate streams - not so much mingling and merging as influencing each other.¹ This method overlooks the significance of varna and jāti, their difference and inter-relation,² the effect of assimilation of non-Aryan elements on the Vedic conceptual system and the accompanying changes in the society.

To avoid the strong natural inclination to judge the Vedic religion and social classes in the light of our ideas about those of the post-Vedic period, it is proposed in this study to trace the social structure, the religious beliefs and the cultural patterns, which gave Vedic society its distinctive character and led to its development into Hinduism.

For an objective and independent assessment of the Brāhmans,

¹ Scholars generally identify the different traits and try to trace them back to the parent culture. Dikshit, K.N.- Prehistoric Civilizations of the Indus Valley, Madras, 1939, pp.35-6; Karve - HSI, p.79.

² The combination of varna and jāti represents the blending of two systems, as a result of the organization of different societies into one unit, Karve - HSI, p.78.

it is essential to try a new approach, especially in view of the fact that their evolution is a controversial and much debated problem. This study is therefore based on the semantic analysis of four of the words, that is vīpra, ṛsi, puróhita and bráhman, that are used in the Rgveda for the composers of the hymns and the functionaries connected with the sacrificial ceremonial.

An analysis of such terms is likely to throw some light on the social structure in general and Vedic priesthood in particular, as the modification in the ideas denoted by these words reflects the evolution of society which moulded the changing concepts. The ideas conveyed by these words have moved by subtle transitions from their derivative meaning to new related meanings and then to meanings only remotely related. The literal and the socio-cultural meanings,¹ that are generally expressed by every word are determined by the help of etymology and the contextual factors.² Thus it becomes necessary, for assessing the meanings of these words, to study them in the context of the social and religious forces which influenced the Vedic culture and ritual.

¹ Charles C. Fries - 'Meaning and Linguistic Analysis' in Language, 30, 1954, pp.66-7; Bhartṛhari - Vākyapadiya, ed. Gangadharā Shastri, Banaras, 1887, II, 316; Raja, K.K. - Indian Theories of Meaning in the Sanskrit Grammarians and the Philosophic Schools, Ph.D. Thesis, London University, 1954, pp.10-11.

² Br. Dev. - II, 118; Raja - ibid., pp.275-7.

Another reason for studying Vedic priesthood in relation to the social and cultural forces is, that though an important religious institution, it was also an integral part of society. Its historical development, structure and system of values are closely connected with those of the society. For a proper analysis and understanding of this institution it is essential to ask historical as well as sociological questions, which will help to analyse the process that moulded the priesthood and to discover its position in the social scheme.¹ Both these questions, which supplement each other, are incorporated in the functional approach.² As functionalism views society in its historical as well as cultural context³ it helps to reconstruct the past and is therefore eminently applicable to the study of Vedic society and the institution of Brāhmanism.⁴

¹ Durkheim considers religion to be a system of symbols through which society takes cognizance of itself, Peristiany, J.G. - Introduction to Sociology and Philosophy by E. Durkheim, tr. by D.F. Pocock, p. XXX, XXXIII.

² Functionalism one of the four approaches in Sociology, was formulated by Spencer and given a rigorous form by Durkheim. Its extreme form was propounded by Malinowsky who related it to culture. Spencer, H. - Principles of Sociology. Malinowsky, B. - The Dynamics of culture change, pp. 41-51; Bottomore, T.B. - Sociology: A Guide to Problems and Literature, pp. 46 ff., 51-2.

³ Malinowski - Dynamics of Culture Change, p. 34.

⁴ Contact between different cultures is primarily the impact between institutions that is groups of people engaged in an organized manner in social, religious and other various activities. The impact generally modifies institutions which assume new forms and functions, Malinowski - ibid., p. VII.

The complete transformation of the Rgvedic society cannot be explained as independent evolution. The intensive changes that took place in it point to the impact of a different culture and a process of cultural interaction.¹ It seems that this process was directed by definite forces and pressures and did not lead to a mechanical mixture of traits but to a transformation of both cultures into a third composite unit.²

Hence the question whether Brahmanism is Aryan or Dravidian, and the search for black priests and discussions as to the proportion of recruitment from the conquered priesthood to the Vedic priestly families,³ all seem to be superfluous. The institution of Brahmanism appears to have evolved as a phenomenon of autonomous change resulting from the co-operation and compromise between the Aryan and the non-Aryan priesthoods. The evolving social pattern and the emergent culture would appear to have helped its development to a great extent.

¹ 'Cultural interaction' is used in this study to denote the process of cultural change through the contact of different cultures, see below, p.94,n.1 ; cf. Malinowski Dy. of Cult. Change pp.18-9.

² Malinowski - ibid., pp.19-26; for a similar development of mythology cf. Campbell, J. - The Masks of God, ^{London} 1962, II, pp.47-8.

³ Kosambi - 'On the Origin of the Brāhman Gotras', JBBRAS, NS 26, 1950, pp.21-80.

CHAPTER II

Sources

Literary records are the main source of our knowledge for the Vedic age - a period of unusual importance for the religious, social and cultural history of India. The social stratification, the religious beliefs and the metaphysical tenets shaped during this period have continued to influence all subsequent development. The emergence of the Brāhmanas as an influential class may be attributed to their leading role in guiding these activities, as it gave them an opportunity of pressing their advantage.

The Samhitās, the Brāhmanas and the early Upanisads give some idea of the process of amalgamation and its direction by priests, through their unintentional and indirect version. The evidence from these sources is supplemented and confirmed by the Sūtras and the Smrtis - a continuation of the same tradition. The Epics especially the Mahābhārata and the Purānas, though considerably revised and transmitted by the sacerdotal class preserve fragments of the old non-Brahmanic tradition. The early Buddhist literature, though later and mainly concerned with a more easterly geographical area is also important, as it gives an idea of the Brāhmanas, their claims and actual position in a region where their eminence was not

undisputed.¹

There is not much archeological evidence to add to these literary records. Excavations carried out at Hastinapur and a number of sites in the upper Ganga basin have yielded some information about the settlers who are hypothetically identified with the Pauravas, the Pañcālas and similar tribes mentioned in the Mahābhārata.³ The material remains discovered so far on these sites are too scanty to be of much help for a sociological or cultural study of this period.⁴

¹ It appears from the Jātaka stories that the Brāhmanas were conscious of being the premier caste. They were generally associated with the functions of learning and teaching, with priestly activities in general and purohitaship in particular. cf. The Jātaka, ed. E.B.Cowell, Tr. R.Chalmers & others, Cambridge, 1895-1913. I. 317-8, III 232, IV p.232, etc.; Fick - Social organisation in N.E. India pp.180-3, 210 etc.; Mehta, Ratilal N. - Pre-Buddhist India, Bombay, 1939, pp.245,248,250 etc. N.K.Wagle also finds that the Brāhmanas were ritually superior but politically subservient (Ph.D. thesis, 1964 - 'Some Aspects of Indian Society as depicted in the Pālī cannon', p.342.) They had their villages, (p.42) received land in gifts (pp.44-46), and were considered entitled to respect. Buddha is said to address them by their gotra names even after their conversion to Buddhism (p.111).

² The first three successive cultural periods have been dated from pre-1200 B.C. to early third century, B.C. Lal, B.B. - 'Excavations at Hastinapur', AI, nos.10-11, 1954-55.

³ Lal ibid., p. 150.

⁴ Bones of animals discovered at the site indicate that complete vegetarianism was not yet the creed of Orthodoxy.

The striking affinity between the Indo-Aryans and the Iranians is reflected in the similarity of the cult and the language of the Rgveda and the Avesta. This should have been of great help and importance in fixing the chronology of the Vedic literature, confirmation of ritual practices and the organization of priesthood, but the surviving Iranian features are obscured by the reforms of Zoroaster. There may be lingering traces of the old cult in the Avesta, especially in the Yašts,¹ but it is not easy to determine whether the similarities are old survivals or the result of a backward movement from India.

The Vedic literature has its limitations as a source of history, social or religious, as it is full of repetitions, contradictions and inconsistencies, which may be ascribed to its oral transmission for centuries,² to its composite nature and to the tendency of Indian religions to accommodate the most divergent creeds and ideas in their ample folds without discarding anything.

Much of the obscurity of the sources may be attributed to the tendency of the priests and the seers to make everything mysterious

¹ Renou, L. - RAI, pp.12-3.

² Hymns of RV. were exposed to change before they were compiled, ibid, p.2.

and cryptic under the pretext that the gods dislike the obvious and prefer the obscure.¹ The Vedic texts ~~sources~~ are also made more indefinite by the compilers who tend to include vague, equivocal and contradictory statements, probably under the influence of the philosophical principle that everything has a relative value and importance and thus deserves notice.

The Vedic literature describes the general lines of religious knowledge and growth and brings together the different means which the religious-minded of that age considered efficacious for fulfilling their desires both in this life and hereafter. The documents, however, mainly deal with the religious beliefs and practices of only a section of the people, the priestly and the ruling classes. They also point to a two-way influence on the rituals and beliefs as the essentials of the beliefs of the higher classes filter through to the popular level, and some of the popular rites and beliefs find their way into the higher religion after appropriate modifications.² The creeds and ritual depicted in the

¹ AB - III. 33; GB - I.1.1, etc.

² cf. Bloomfield, M. - Hymns of the Atharva-veda, pp. XLV-XLVI; Macdonell, A.A. - HSL, p. 263; Idea of a personal God forced upon metaphysicians by popular religion. Zaehner, R.C. - AT Sundry Times, London, 1958, p. 167.

source books are not uniform, stationary or unalterable. The religious life over our period appears to have been not a matter of maintaining static norms but rather a movement or a growing tradition.

In spite of these shortcomings, these records are valuable for the reconstruction of the Vedic society. Besides being the sole source of information for this period, the texts now apparently detached and isolated were no doubt conditioned by the historical moment and the cultural style of the epoch in which they were produced and compiled, and thus reflect that society to some extent. When examined against the background of cultural amalgamation and also with reference to the circumstances that led to their compilation, they yield valuable evidence for the development of the contemporary social institutions.

Most of the Vedic texts assumed their present form after successive redactions. Their contents thus represent the work of various authors, and belong to different periods.¹ The compilation of these texts especially the Samhitās appears to have been contemporaneous with the consolidation of political power and the adoption of urban civilization by the Aryans. The incentive for compilation was in all probability supplied by the establishment and

¹ Keith - RPVU, II, pp. 440, 498; the same - RV Brāhmanas, pp. 40 ff.

development of orthodoxy in the Vedic society.¹

Besides this, the linguistic and the conceptual differences between the Vedic and the post-Vedic literature often makes the interpretation of the former extremely difficult. The ambiguity of the Vedic literature especially of the hymns of the Rgveda is also obvious from the different interpretations of the same passages that are suggested by scholars to support the most divergent theories. Various theories have therefore been suggested for the proper understanding of the Rgveda. On the one hand Max Müller in the last century interpreted these hymns as the simple poetic effusions of a pastoral people addressed to barely personified forces of nature.² On the other, a number of Indian scholars, the latest of whom is V.S.Agravala, have claimed to find a profound philosophy in every part of the Rgveda.³

As nothing is clear-cut in these source books, it is not possible to make any statement without some qualification. Hence it was necessary to draw certain generalizations in order to reduce the prevailing confusion. Some of these are, that the religion of the

¹ Weber - HIL, pp.33-5; see below, pp 125ff.

² Müller - Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religions as illustrated by the Religions of India, London, 1880, cf. the same - HASL, 1859.

³ Agravala, V.S. - Sparks from the Vedic Fire: A New Approach to Vedic Symbolism, Varanasi, 1962.

Rgveda is polytheistic, the contents of the Brāhmanas are ritualistic and that the Upanisads embody philosophical speculations that are a reaction against excessive ritualism.

These generalizations though helpful in explaining satisfactorily the increasing importance and influence of the Brāhmans as a class, at times become over-simplifications that ignore important trends indicated in the literature itself. In this process of simplification the Brāhman class manages to appropriate too much importance at the expense of the rest of the society. It is quite possible that the component thought-currents that contributed to the totality of Vedic religion helped the Brāhmans to consolidate their advantageous position. But the course of an evolutionary religion like the Vedic is likely to be conditioned by general culture, which is usually directed by certain specific values of life. A dispassionate inquiry into these values and the fundamentals of belief should therefore prove helpful for an approximately correct interpretation of the sacred literature and an appraisal of the Brāhmans, who are ~~were~~ the authors ~~were~~ of this literature.

Different views regarding the religious concepts of early Vedic society, account for the preference for any given method of interpretation. It is not possible to explain the whole of Vedic religion in its broad outline by following any one of the existing

theories such as that the cult consisted primarily of nature-worship,¹ that it was fundamentally philosophical, or that it can be explained by ethnological² or philological principles. But taken together these theories may help to reconstruct the complete picture of Vedic religion. The Vedic mythology is concerned not only with nature myths, or functional deities, or the tripartite social structure³ but also with a combination and integration of all these into an orderly whole, which is the rta of the Rgveda.⁴

For the proper understanding of the Vedic hymns, mythology and ritual, Renou recommends the method suggested by Bergaigne,⁵ that is, to treat the sacrifice as a case of seeking correspondence, analogy and inter-connection between the microcosm and the macrocosm. The idea of establishing correspondence between the familiar world of human existence and the world whose existence was a matter of conjecture, marks the tentative efforts of the Vedic poets to bridge the gulf which separated the two. The continuity established through

¹ See above, p.42a ; Macdonell, A.A. - Vedic Mythology; Keith - RPVU, pp.58-9.

² cf. Wikander, Stig - Der arische Männerbund, Lund, 1938.

³ Benveniste, Émile - 'Traditions indo-iraniennes sur les classes sociales' in J.Asiat., 1938, 2nd. part, p.529. ff.

⁴ Renou - The Civilization in Ancient India, p.29.

⁵ cf. Renou - RAI, pp.17-8.

analogy between the worlds of the seer and of the Gods, made the Vedic seer feel less isolated. Apparently it was this system of seeking correspondence that later led through progressive approximations¹ to the final identification, which is repeatedly affirmed in the Upanisads.²

The Indian mind as reflected in the Rgveda displays from the beginning a leaning towards mystic thought.³ The desire to attain immortality results in the pre-occupation of religion with the experience of an eternal mode of being. This desire also guides reflective thought towards establishing the immortality of human soul and its relationship to the totality of existence.⁴

Thus the religion which started from polytheism in the Rgveda, entered on a quest for the unifying principle of the universe and its relation with that part of human being which was instinctively felt to be immortal. The continuous development of this idea⁵ is thus one of the cohesive factors of the Vedic literature.

¹ AV - IV.1; X.2; XI.5; TB.II.8.8.8-10, etc.; for the passion for identification in the Brāhmaṇas, cf. Edgerton, F. - 'The Upaniṣads: What do They Seek and Why?' in JAOS, 49, 1929, pp. 99, 116.

² Br.Up, I.4.10; Kaus.Up, I.6; Keith - RPVU, II, 513 ff.

³ Macdonell - HSL, pp. 65-6; Edgerton - JAOS, 82, 1962, p. 92.

⁴ Weber - HIL, p. 27; Renou - RAI, p. 8; cf. RV.III.54.9. Zaehner - At Sundry Times, p. 163.

⁵ Keith - RPVU, II, pp. 433, 494, 496.

The polytheism of the Rgveda, though akin in some respects to the other branches of Indo-European polytheism, shows a significant difference. The seers tend to attribute the same qualities to almost all the gods, so that their differences are blurred. As this leads to the identification of the one with another or with all, apparently it implies the awareness of the seers that the different gods are the manifestations of some higher power.¹ On this assumption the seers did not consider it inconsistent or contradictory to assign the highest place, the same attribute and the same functions to many of the gods.

The fundamental question of finding the unifying and the unitary principle of the universe that is fully developed in the Upanisads, appears to be a logical development of the idea of unity expressed in the Rgveda.² The Brāhmanas inherit this concept and the speculations connected with it, and elaborate it in the context of ritual. The main contribution of the Brāhmanas is the development of the doctrine of sacrifice with all its fanciful interpretations and accompanying magical functions. The identification of sacrifice

¹ Similar vague ideas about the underlying unity of the gods appear to have been entertained by the Babylonians, for whom every god-name implied the true and all-embracing godhead. Thus the idea of one central Divine figure, later crystallized by the Assyrians, may be taken to exist as an innate feeling among the Babylonians.
ERE, Vol. VI, pp.250-251.

² RV - I.164,46; VIII. 58/Vāl.10.2; X.114.5.

with Prajāpati,¹ and its association with creation,² indicate the importance attached to the idea of the fundamental unity of all things during this period. The system of establishing correspondences is continued in the identification of sacrificial accessories with the elements of nature.

A general survey of the Brāhmanas and the Upanisads gives the impression that the former contain much elaborate ritual in sharp contrast to the introverted speculations of the latter. A closer study of the sources leads to the realization that this proposition is only partially true. The culmination of the Rgvedic polytheism in the pantheistic monism of the Upanisads is not merely the apparent submergence of a life-affirming extrovert type of religion in an introverted esoteric faith. It is also the logical development of the idea of the inherent unity of all things that originated with the observation and contemplation of nature, was the basis of the henotheism of the Rgveda, and finally evolved into the identification of the gods with the underlying impersonal spirit.³

¹ SB - I.5.1.16; VI.3.5, etc.; PB - XIII.11.18; VII.2.1.

² Sacrifice is connected with the creation of the world from RV - X.90 onwards; Keith - RPVU, pp. 444, 619 ff.

³ See above, p. 46 n. 2

Reflection on visible phenomena disclosed the existence of an inherent power that surpassed the individual aspect and also contained it. The resulting deification was not merely of the physical aspect but also of the ideal concept. Side by side with the physical aspects of Agni, Soma, Savitr and others, is found an ideal concept of which the former is considered a manifestation. Thus the Vedic gods though personified are treated as transcending the powers that are inherent in nature. The vedic seers through reflection and speculation, went on detecting the full mutual relationships of the objects in the phenomenal world, and finally arrived at the concept of an impersonal, all-prevading spirit, which is inherent yet beyond the universe. It is true that the development did not always follow a straight course, but had to pass through various phases and was no doubt influenced by many factors.

Thus it may be safely assumed that no hard and fast line divided the thought-world of the Samhitās, the Brāhmanas and the Upanisads.¹ The same trend of reflection and generalization is perceptible in all the source books. Speculation was naturally vague in the beginning but became progressively more explicit and probably more widely circulated in keeping with the period, region and social conditions. It is quite probable that the final

¹ cf. Edgerton, F. - 'The Philosophic materials of the Atharvaveda', in Studies in Honour of Maurice Bloomfield, New Haven and London, 1920, p.123.

analysis which appears in the Upanisads is the product of Aryan and non-Aryan thought, not solely as the result of the influence of the one on the other or as borrowing, but as the transformation of both elements. The thought process represents to some extent the contribution of people, who had not only assimilated foreign elements but whose blood was becoming more and more mixed.¹

It is not possible to interpret the complex Vedic literature with the help of a single theory, as these theories when applied singly succeed in explaining only a small proportion of the hymns and the myths. Pursuing any single method to its logical end usually results in fanciful interpretations in order to make the passages yield what the interpreter wishes them to mean. So the suggestion of interpreting the ritual and the mythology as the means of establishing correspondence between the ideal and the phenomenal worlds should also be followed with moderation and in conjunction with the other methods.

The theory of correspondence has one advantage that it helps us to view the literature as a continuous whole connected with certain fundamental ideas. It also suggests a clue for an appropriate analysis and understanding of Vedic thought. It is

¹ Keith - RPVU, II, p.497.

clear from the hymns that all seers were neither equally inspired nor capable of visualizing the ultimate reality.¹ Their ranks included those poets, who could grasp the highest principle and translate it into words, and also the priests whose vision did not extend beyond material gifts and the means of acquiring them. But it appears from the literature that the Vedic seers and the priests whether selfish schemers or profound mystics, were on the whole aware of the main truths enunciated during this period. This survey of the leading ideas of the whole of Vedic literature besides being helpful for the problem of interpretation, should also help in the critical separation of the old and the new in it.²

In the absence of any authentic dates the chronology of the sources is mostly conjectural, allowing a margin not of decades but of centuries.³ The relative order of the texts is approximately fixed by the differences noticed in the language, style, contents, religious views and the indirect references to social conditions and geographical regions.⁴ With the help of these criteria the

¹ cf. RV.X.71.7.

² Müller - HASL, p.530.

³ Weber thinks the search for definite chronology to be fruitless, HIL, pp.6-7. According to S. Lévi all Vedic works were compiled at the same time. cf. Renou, L. - 'Sylvain Lévi et son oeuvre scientifique', J. Asiat., 1936, 1st part, p.17.

⁴ Winternitz - HL, p.26.

sources are classified into three main periods, that of the Rgveda, of the later Samhitās and the Brāhmanas, and of the early Upanisads, allowing reasonable time for differences to develop during each period.¹

The Buddhist literature, which has more reliable dates, presupposes the bulk of the Vedic literature,² so a lower limit for the Vedic Age was easy to fix. But to determine the upper limit of the earliest compositions proved a more complicated problem. Speculations on the great antiquity of the Rgveda,³ importance of astronomical references for fixing the dates of the Vedic texts⁴ and the efforts to trace some of the Rgvedic hymns to the Indo-Iranian⁵ period have been mostly found inconsistent with the relative position of the Rgveda in the general perspective of the Indo-European languages and the West Asiatic Culture patterns.

¹ Müller classified the Vedic literature into four periods (HASL) His distinction of chandas and mantra period was later dropped, but the dates suggested by him have been on the whole accepted; Macdonell classifies the literature into the periods of the Samhitās, of the Brāhmanas and of the Sūtras, HSL, p.29.

² Winternitz, - HL,ⁱp.27; Renou - RAI, p.8.

³ Tilak, B.G. - The Orion or Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas, Bombay, 1893; The Arctic Home in the Vedas (reprinted) Poona, 1956.

⁴ Jacobi, H. - 'Über das Alter der Rgveda', in Festgruss an Rudolph von Roth, ed. E.W.A. Kuhn, Stuttgart, 1893, pp.68 ff.

⁵ Roth - Zur Litteratur und Geschichte des Weda, p.8; Weber - HIL, p.5; for contradiction, Bloomfield - Rigveda repetitions, II, p.645; Ved.Ind, I, pp.29, 349 etc.; ibid., II, 63.

The discovery of the text of a treaty between a Hittite king and a prince of the Mittani of the fourteenth century B.C. containing the names of gods of the Vedic type, was expected to supply a guiding date for the Vedic chronology.¹ It has however complicated matters, as it is doubtful whether the gods referred to are really Vedic or Indo-Iranian, and whether their worshippers were moving towards India or were emigrants from India.² The text of the treaty as well as certain technical terms of Aryan origin in a Hittite treatise on the training of horses, simply attest the existence of a Vedic type of language and gods in that region in the fourteenth century B.C. Most probably they belonged to a third independent branch of the Indo-Iranians, who had settled in that area.³

The discovery of the ruins at Harappa and Mohenjodaro has helped to some extent by supplying an approximate date for the arrival of the Indo-Aryans as they are associated with the

¹ Chattopadhyaya, K. - 'The Boghazkoi Inscriptions and their Value for Vedic Chronology', in The Calcutta Review, 1924, pp.287 ff.;

² Renou - RAI, p.4.

³ Burrow, T. - SL.pp.29-30.

destruction of the Indus civilization.¹ This at least sets a limit to the composition of the earliest hymns, which is now generally agreed as circa 1500 B.C.² On the basis of the similarity between the language of the Hymns of the Rgveda and the earlier gāthās of the Avesta, the date of the former is brought down to 1000 B.C. assigning the contents of the hymns to a more ancient date.³

The Rgveda, oldest and most important of the four Samhitās,⁴ is not a practical collection like the Sāmaveda and the Yajurveda, which were compiled for the benefit of particular priests.⁵ It includes many hymns that could never be used in ritual. Moreover the arrangement does not follow the fixed order of sacrifices.⁶ The compilation thus appears to have been made in order to preserve the heritage of sacred hymns.⁷

¹ Wheeler, M. - Ind.Civ, p.99.

² Basham - The Wonder That Was India, p.31.

³ Ghosh, B.K. Ved.Age, pp.203 ff., 225.

⁴ cf. KB - VI.11, tat paricaranāvitarau vedau.

⁵ Sāyana discusses the different character of the Rgveda in the Rgveda-Bhāṣya-bhūmikā, p.34.

⁶ AB and KB begin with the dīkṣanīyā iṣṭi and the Āś.ŚS with the darśa-pūrṇamās; Müller - HASL, pp.457 ff.

⁷ Keith - RPVU, I.p.1; Macdonell - HSL, p.40.

On the basis of the development of the language, religion and society, the collection is assumed to have acquired its present form after three successive redactions.¹ The family books, that is the second to the seventh, and the first, except for its first fifty hymns, represent the oldest collection. The early portion of the first book and the eighth were added in the second phase. Hymns addressed to Soma Pavamāna, apparently drawn from the other books, make up the ninth book. The linguistic development,² the growth of religious ideas³ and the fact that the number of its hymns is identical with the first book, mark the tenth as the latest.

This relative order of the books of the Rgveda is generally accepted. It is however quite possible that some earlier hymns may have been preserved in the later books, and some later hymns might have found their way in the earlier books.⁴

¹ Macdonell - HSL, pp. 41 ff;

² Language of the tenth book of the RV is in the transitory stage between that of the earlier books and of the later Samhitās. Vowel contractions become more frequent and the hiatus rarer. Use of older inflexions like āsas, and words such as sīm is on the decline, and new words like kata, evam etc. begin to appear.

³ Some of the older deities like ¹⁰⁻~~Dān~~ disappear, and abstract ideas are defined. Spells and incantations, besides philosophical speculations are also found, Keith - RPVU, I, p. 2.

⁴ Winternitz, ^{HL, I,} p. 59.

Internal evidence shows that the poets were aware of more than one generation of seers,¹ and frequently refer to old and new songs.² Recurring repetitions indicate that greater sanctity was attached to old hymns, so the later poets tried to incorporate lines of the older songs in their compositions.³ It is apparent from the linguistic and cultural development that centuries had elapsed between the composition of the early hymns and their final compilation,⁴ and that during this period they were exposed to change.⁵

Besides the general classification of the Rgveda, efforts are also made to distinguish the earlier and later groups in individual books.⁶ According to Muller the hymns of the Rgveda as a whole belonged to two periods. The earlier hymns are characterized by originality and the later are imitative and reflective. His

¹ RV.1.1.2. III.1.20, etc.

² RV.III.32.13, etc.

³ 5,000 lines in the Rv. out of 40,000 are repetitions; cf. Bloomfield, M. - The Vedic concordance, 1906; Rgveda Repetitions, 1916.

⁴ Winternitz - HL, p.302.

⁵ Renou - RAI, p.2; Vedic Variants, 3 vols., by M. Bloomfield and F. Edgerton, Philadelphia, 1930-34.

⁶ Macdonell, HSL, p.45-46.

criterion was that the hymns referring to sacrifice or the priests in general terms are earlier, and those mentioning the same in technical terms should be considered later.¹ Arnold, on the other hand, divides the Rgveda into five strata on the basis of the peculiarity of metre,² but this division does not agree with the generally accepted view regarding the development of religion reflected in the Samhitā. Thus the hymns addressed to the goddess Dawn and generally ascribed to the earliest period, come to be assigned to a secondary stage of religion by sole reliance on the metrical test.³

Fixing the relative order of individual groups, hymns or verses on the basis of a single criterion generally involves futile

¹ Hymns like RV. I.10; or V.44, 14; that refer to the priests as rtvij or as reciters etc. do not indicate the same level of development as the hymns that mention them by the terms hotr, Adhvaryu and so on as in III.36.10; Similarly the verses III.29.10, or VIII. 27.19-22, that contain simple prayers to accept offerings are presumably earlier than III.28.1, 4, 5-6, which are nothing but incantations for the three daily libations. Müller, HASL, p.489 ff. Such criteria will result in dating each hymn separately.

² Arnold E.V. - Vedic Metre in its Historical Development, Cambridge, 1905; for contrary views, Keith-JRAS. I, 1906, pp.486-90; Bloomfield - Rgveda Repetitions, pp.535 ff., 640, etc.

³ Keith - RPVU, I, p.3.

discussions. The language of the hymns that were orally transmitted for a long time, and were compiled in an age of changed linguistic conditions, could not but assume a certain uniformity.¹ The date of the Rgveda, on purely linguistic grounds, can be placed anywhere between 2000 B.C. and 1000 B.C.² Caution has to be exercised in ascribing dates on the basis of the contents alone, especially the relative prevalence of superstitious feeling and philosophic ideas. The fact that a given hymn is included in the later strata of the Rgveda does not necessarily prove the later date of its composition. It is quite possible that such ideas existed and developed in different streams³ and were incorporated on gaining popularity. A judicious combination of the latest linguistic researches and other indications derived from arrangement, subject matter and metre may make it possible to recognize the different strata in the Rgveda.

The Rgveda is assigned to the hotr priest, but it is not the Samhitā for that priest in the same sense as the Sāmaveda and the Yajurveda are for the udgātr and the adhvaryu.

¹ Macdonell - HSL, p.47.

² Winternitz - HL, p.308.

³ Renou - RAI, p.8.

respectively.¹ The non-liturgical nature of the Rgveda,² and the priestly influence betrayed in the selection and arrangement of the hymns³ indicate that the collection took shape when priestly influence was beginning to be felt, but the ritual had not assumed excessive importance.⁴

The earlier hymns of the Rgveda were composed in the land of the Indus and its tributaries,⁵ but its main part is believed to have taken shape in the land of the Kurus between the Sutlej and the Yamuna during 1200 and 1000 B.C.⁶ The latest hymns are believed to have been composed a century later, and the final redaction probably assumed its present form about 800 B.C.⁷

¹ Though the RV. does contain most of the hymns of the Sāma and Yajur-Veda, it could not be described as a collection for the special benefit of the brāhman priest, who in his supervising capacity was expected to know the duties of the other three priests and was at times maintained to be a hotr. The inclusion of non-liturgical hymns and the disregard for the fixed order of ceremonial in its arrangement, reduce the practical value of this Samhitā for the Brāhman priest, and establish its non-sacrificial character and its earlier date, Müller - HASL, pp.475-7.

² For contrary views, Ghosh - Ved.Age, p.226.

³ Apri sūktas indicate systematic arrangement, Müller - HASL, pp.465-7.

⁴ Müller - ibid, p.477.

⁵ Rgvedic horizon is bound mainly by the north-west of India with glimpses of a few features of Afghanistan; It gradually widens to reach the Ganges in the East; Renou - RAI. p.4.

⁶ Weber - HIL, p.39; Müller - HASL, p.572.

⁷ Edition into Samhitā text about 600 B.C., Macdonell HSL, p.50.

The Sāmaveda is the earliest of the later Samhitās,¹ and is closely related to the Rgveda. The Samhitā presupposes a fixed order of the ceremonial, which is followed in the arrangement of the hymns. Its significance for religion lies in the form of the chants and their importance for the ritual,² Historically it is not very important, as all but seventy-five hymns are taken from the eighth and especially the ninth book of the Rgveda.³ Weber took Sāmaveda to be anterior to the Rgveda on the basis of the variants that occur in the two Samhitas.⁴ The Sāman readings, according to him, are preserved in their archaic form on account of the sanctity of the ritual tradition, but he considers the forms occurring in the Rgveda to have undergone change during the period of its oral transmission. But the sacrificial character of the Sāmaveda leaves

¹ When reproducing verses from the RV, the VS generally adheres to the original reading. But it gives the forms that are found in the SV in contrast to the Rgvedic readings, when quoting verses that are used as sāman chants; Macdonell - HSL, p.173.

² Keith - RPVU, p.16.

³ Macdonell - HSL, p.171.

⁴ Weber - HIL, pp.64-5; cf. pp.8-9.

no doubt about its being later.

The formulae used by the adhvaryu and his assistants at the great sacrifices and collected in the Yajurveda mark an advance in the elaboration of ritual and the consolidation of the classes, especially the priesthood. These formulae were no doubt current from the beginning of the sacrificial ritual, but the idea of compiling them probably owes its origin to the redaction of the Rgveda.¹ The Yajurveda contains formulae for the entire sacrificial ritual in contrast to the Rgveda and the Sāmaveda, of which the first prominently and the second exclusively devote themselves to Soma ritual.²

The later explanation of the names of the two recensions in which the Yajurveda has come down, suggests that the distinction of Black and White was based on the inclusion and omission of the explanatory remarks from the formulae.³ The function of the adhvaryu was such that his hymns and invocations came to be accompanied at a comparatively early period by explanations of the text, symbolical interpretation of the ritual and stories to illustrate

¹ Keith - RPVU, I, p.17.

² Macdonell - HSL, p.181.

³ Müller - HASL, p.350-51.

the sacrificial performance.¹ This mixed collection has three complete recensions, the Taittirīya, the Kāthaka and the Maitrāyanī, and one imperfect recension known as Kapisthala^{Kāthaka}. All four are closely connected and follow a similar principle in the arrangement of the contents. The Maitrāyanī and the Kāthaka are related in language and have many forms in common.² The Taittirīya Samhitā consisting of seven books is somewhat later than the other three, but all the recensions of the Black Yajurveda are earlier than the Vājasaneyī Samhitā. The latter appears to be either an effort to restore the earlier condition of the formulae in prose and verse or to produce a collection without the explanatory prose like the other two Vedas. The difference between the two versions may be ascribed to the changes in the organization of the priesthood, for the Black Yajurveda pays great attention to the hotr and his duties, but references to him are of rare occurrence in the White.³

The first eighteen books of the Vājasaneyī represent the fundamental collection, the next seven mark the second stage and the remaining fourteen, especially the last ten, seem to be added in

¹ Keith - RPVU, p.17.

² Macdonell - HSL, p.176.

³ Weber - HIL, p.86.

response to the development of the ritual.¹ The addition of the last book, the Íśopanisad, is significant, as it appears to be an attempt to strike a balance between ritual and speculation and to stress that these are not opposed to each other.

Social and religious conditions as well as the geographical area reflected in the Yajurveda differ from those of the Rgveda.² The performance of sacrifice has assumed greater importance and the process that later reversed the relationship between the gods and the sacrifice is beginning to show its effect. Inclusion of some of the popular rites in the ritual ceremonial is another notable feature of the Yajurveda.³

Of the three later Samhitās the Atharva-veda was the last to be compiled,⁴ though its contents in part at least are recognized to be quite old.⁵ Magic incantations connected with sacrificial ritual

¹ Macdonell - HSL, p.179.

² Macdonell - ibid., pp.174,184.

³ ~~Macdonell~~ - TS, VII.4.19; VII,5.10; MS - II.9.1; KāpS -XXVII.2ff.

⁴ Ghose argues that the Atharvaveda was the first to be compiled by the priests of the north-west, when they went to the eastern region which were populated by superstitious non-Aryans, and were ruled by philosopher kings. The other Samhitās were compiled later, Indo-Aryan Language & Culture Origins, p.84.

⁵ Weber - HIL, 11; Müller, HASL, 447.

also occur in the other Samhitās,¹ but the Atharva-veda is in essence a collection of spells to secure success in every conceivable enterprise. The Atharva-veda, on the whole, is more concerned with the domestic ritual² and has an external and mechanical connection only with the major sacrifices.³

The position of the Atharva-veda in the sacred literature is reflected in a passage of the Taittirīya Aranyaka, which describes it as the tail while discussing the relative importance of the Śruti texts.⁴ The Atharva-veda was ignored to some extent by the orthodox priesthood,⁵ as it was almost unconnected with the subject

¹ Bloomfield - Hymns of AV. p.XXX; Macdonell - HSL, pp.120,190; RV.I.191; V.55. VII.50, etc.; TS.1.3.2.1.; 6.2.11.1-2; VS.V.23.

² Weber - HIL, p.147.

³ Macdonell, HSL, p.192; cf. Whitney, W.D. - *On the History of the Vedic Texts*, JAOS, IV, 1854, p.254. For contrary views Bloomfield, Hymns of AV., p. LXX. The peculiar character of AV. is recognized by tradition, which describes it as yajñānupayuktah atyanta-vilaksana eva, Prasthānabheda I.10; contrast Kumārila I.3.

⁴ TA VII.3

⁵ TS- VII. 5.11, alludes to āṅgirasah with rk, sāman and yajus; but RV. X.90.9, approximately contemporaneous, does not refer to the atharvan charms while mentioning the other three literary types. The conspicuous omission of the AV. without a pronounced disapproval, that characterizes the Śrauta literature, signifies that the magico-religious aspect of the literature forbade any genuine discrimination against AV; the omission may be attributed to the preoccupation of the Śrauta literature with the ritual in the narrower sense, Bloomfield, Ibid., pp.XXVIII - LVI.

matter of sacrifice, and reflected the general beliefs of the lower strata of society. The addition of spells and charms bearing directly on sacrificial ritual,¹ of philosophical hymns², and of the hymns used by the brāhmaṇācchamsin priest indicates efforts at conscious refining to raise this Samhitā to the status of the other Vedas.³ The peculiar character of the Atharva-veda is generally attributed to the influence of the religious beliefs of the non-Aryans.⁴

The geographical data in the Atharva-veda is not sufficient to indicate any definite region where the hymns were composed.⁵ The language also does not supply any clue except that it is later than

¹ Keith - RPVU, I, p.181.

² The large quantity of philosophic contents of AV. suggests that these were probably incorporated when the Samhitā was prepared as the Brahma veda, Bloomfield - The Atharva-veda, pp. 35 ff. Edgerton, F. - 'The Philosophic Materials of the Atharva-veda' in Studies in honour of M. Bloomfield, pp.117, 137.

³ The association of Angiras and Bhṛgu, two well-known families of fire-priests, suggests that their influence helped the AV formulae to be acknowledged as the integral part of the solemn ceremonial, Weber - HIL, p.148; The works of the Atharvan schools claim that the AV is the samhitā of the brāhmaṇ priest and that the purohita should be a follower of the AV, probably to vindicate the character of their Veda. Bloomfield, Hymns of AV. pp. LVIII-LXII.

⁴ Ridgeway, W. - Dramas and Dramatic Dances of the non-European Races, Cambridge, 1915, p.122; Renou - RAI, p.6.

⁵ Weber - HIL, p.147; AV. V.22 mentions certain tribes of the north-east and the east, thus implying a region bound by the area of their occupation.

that of the Rgveda and earlier than the linguistic development of the Brāhmanas. A large number of popular words, some of them of peculiar prakritized form, are a remarkable feature of its vocabulary.¹ As the Atharva-veda is not mentioned in the older portions of the earlier Brāhmanas, its compilation is taken to be contemporaneous with them.² On the basis of the arrangement of the hymns the first thirteen books are thought to be the earliest.³ The fifteenth and the sixteenth books are considered later on the basis of their prose which resembles that of the Brāhmanas. The contents of the fourteenth and eighteenth books are mostly borrowed from the tenth book of the Rgveda. The remaining two books are undoubtedly the latest, as these are not noticed in the Prātiśākhyas of the Atharvaveda.⁴

¹ Macdonell - HSL, p.196.

² Weber, HIL, p.11.

³ Division of the AV in twenty books is stated in GB.1.8; whereas AV.XIX.22.23 seems to imply that it formerly consisted of 16 books, Ind.St., IV.pp.432-4. Books I-VI, are very likely the original nucleus. Whitney and Lanman-AV. Saṃhitā, I, p. CXLII.

⁴ Whitney and Lanman - AV Saṃhitā, I,pp.CXLI; II, pp.895 ff.; cf. Macdonell - HSL, p.188.

Hymns extolling the purohita and the Brāhmans¹ suggest that the Samhitā was compiled when the Brāhmans had become a dominant class. Though late in date the Atharva-veda is no less important than the Rgveda for the history of the Vedic civilization. It exhibits popular beliefs and cults, and thus supplements the data from the Rgveda, which is more concerned with the religion of the upper classes.

The Brāhmanas are very important for the study of the Vedic priesthood,² as they portray the accumulated thoughts of a long succession of priests and priestly thinkers.³ These texts explain the mutual relation of the hymns and the ceremonial and their symbolic meaning in the context of the duties of the different priests. The subject matter is therefore arranged in accordance with the duties of the priest attached to the Veda to which the Brāhmana belongs.⁴ The exegetical, linguistic and etymological explanations interwoven in support of the explanation of the

¹ AV - III.19; V.7, etc.

² Eggeling, J. - The Śatapatha Brāhmana,^{pt. I,} pp. IX-X.

³ Müller - HASL, pp. 429 ff.;^{ca} Vamśa Brāhmana assigned to the SV, and the lists of vamśas in the SB.

⁴ Weber - HIL, p. 14.

ceremonial illustrate ~~of~~ the efforts of the priests in these directions.¹ Myths and philosophical explanations are introduced to confirm the cosmogonic and theosophic theories that are expounded in the Brāhmanas.² The shallow pedantry of the Brāhmanas, though punctuated by striking thoughts, bold assertions and sound reasoning, is magnified by an insistence on connecting everything with the sacrificial ritual.³ The tendency to confine the importance of the hymns to their application to innumerable details of sacrifice is taken to suggest that the earlier concept of the gods and the original meaning of the hymns was no longer understood owing to changes in the language or a break in the tradition.⁴ This assumption does not seem to be justified, as the elaborate and the complicated ceremonial which the Brāhmanas presuppose is connected with the sacrifices that are known to the Samhitās. Major sacrifices and a multiplicity of priests were also not unknown to

¹ Eggeling - Op.cit., P.XXIV.

² Macdonell - HIL, p.33.

³ Müller - HASL, p.389.

⁴ Müller - ibid., p.429, 432-34; Macdonell - HIL, p.32.

the R̥gvedic seers. The excessive emphasis in the Brāhmanas on sacrifice and its correct performance is natural, as they profess to be ritual texts. The elaboration of ritual may be attributed to leisure, to the desire to impress by mysterious details, or to the expediency of including popular rites.

The Brāhmanas represent the period of transition from the Vedic to the Brāhmanic mode of thought and social order, which they helped to consolidate.¹ The earlier Brāhmanas mark the beginning of this transition and the later ones coincide with its close.² According to the relative order, which is more or less fixed, the first five books of the Aitareya Brāhmana are considered to be the oldest in the Brāhmana literature.³ Prose portions of the Taittirīya Samhitā and the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmana are also taken to be old.⁴ The Kausītaki, the Jaiminīya and the Śatapatha Brāhmanas form the more recent group

¹ Weber - HIL, p.12.

² Pāṇini - IV.3.105 mentions purāṇaprokta Brāhmanas; Goldstücker T. - Pāṇini, London, 1861, pp.132 ff; Ind.St. V, 64 ff.

³ Keith - RV. Brāhmanas, pp.22, ff., 29, 31 ff.

⁴ Macdonell - HSL, p.203.

among the important works.¹ The Gopatha Brāhmaṇa belonging to the Atharva-veda and the Brāhmaṇas of the Sāmaveda are among the latest.² The lower date for the Brāhmaṇas is circa 600 B.C. or at the most circa 500 B.C.³

The Upanisads mark a shift from sacrificial ceremonial to an emphasis on speculative thought. The aim of human endeavour, as described in these texts, is not so much to gain heaven as to obtain release from mundane existence.

The emphasis of the Upanisads on knowledge as the true means of release resulted in minimizing the importance of sacrificial ritual.⁴ The manner of discussion and the number of teachers mentioned in the Upanisads indicate that these collections do not mark the beginning of philosophical activity, but are a continuation of a long tradition of reflection and

¹ Keith - RPVU, I, p.19; KB later than AB, RV. Brāhmaṇas, pp.26.42; for priority of the Kauṣītaki, Keith - BSOS, I, pt.4, 1920, p.177 ff.

² Macdonell - HSL, p.203, The relative order of the oldest Brāhmaṇas differs slightly according to Macdonell. The earliest is the prose portion of YV, which is followed by the PB and the TB; he takes the JB, the KB and the AB as belonging to the more recent group.

³ 800 B.C. a reasonable maximum date for the composition of the earliest Brāhmaṇas, Keith - RV. Brāhmaṇas, p.49.

⁴ Better results are attributed to knowledge in comparison to the performance of the sacrifice: Br. UP - VI.2.15-16. Ch. UP - II. 23.

speculation.¹ As the Upanisads represent a collection of speculative streams loosely strung together they do not attempt to present a logically coherent view of reality. The discussions follow two main trends, one towards absolute monism and the other towards theism.² The former culminates in the Māndūkya Upanisad and the latter finds its earliest expression in the Śvetāsvatara.

A relative sequence of the Upanisads is attempted on the basis of the development of thought and literary style.³ The Brhadāraṇyaka, the Kausītaki and the Taittirīya Upanisads, part of the Kena and the Jaiminīya Upanisad Brāhmaṇa are among the earliest of the important Upanisads which are placed about 500 B.C.⁴ Thus they overlap the latest Brāhmaṇas. This group of early Upanisads is followed by the Katha, the Īśa and the Svetāśvatara. The Mundaka and the Praśna are included among the latest. Among the early Upanisads, the Chāndogya and the Brhadāraṇyaka are important for social history. The theory of transmigration, which has such a hold on all Indian sects, is

¹ The list of teachers or the vaṃśas given in the earliest Upanisads.

² Zaehner - Hinduism, p.105.

³ Hume, R.E. - The thirteen Principal Upanisads, p.XIII.

⁴ Macdonell, HSL, p.226; Keith - RPVU, I, p.20.

first discussed in these Upanisads in the course of a discussion of the relative merits of knowledge and faith, and of sacrifice and good works.¹

The Sūtras do not properly belong to the Vedic Age, but they supplement and clarify the statements of the earlier sources, as their contents are based on the ritual and customs current in the later Vedic period.² The Śrauta Sūtras in fact may be described as the continuation of the ritual side of the Brāhmaṇas.³ It is an indication of the diminishing popularity of the ritual, that the speculative side of the Brāhmaṇas finds a freer and fuller development in the Upanisads, whereas the Śrauta Sūtras have hardly any original matter.⁴ Their efforts are confined to giving a systematic shape to the ritual and its details. Their aim is not to interpret ceremonial or custom but to give a plain and methodical account of the rites and practices with which they deal. Complete information regarding any sacrifice has to be

¹ Macdonell - HSL, p.224; Br. UP., VI.2, 15-16, Ch. UP., V.10.

² Keith - RPVU, I, p.27.

³ Weber - HIL, pp.15-16; for mutual relations of the Brāhmaṇas and the Sūtras, Ind.St., VIII, pp.76-77.

⁴ Macdonell, HSL, p.244.

collected from the different Śrauta Sūtras, as each one of them deals with the duties of only one of the three classes of priests. By systematizing and condensing the unwieldy ritual details from the floating tradition and the Brāhmanas, the Śrauta Sūtras became the handy manuals for the priests and the foundation of the priestly lore.¹

Of the two Śrauta Sūtras that belong to the Rgveda, the Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra connected with the Brāhmana of the same name is believed, on the basis of its matter and style, to be older than the Āśvalāyana related to the Aitareya Brāhmana.² Of the allied group of four Śrauta Sūtras appended to the Black Yajurveda, the Mānava Śrauta Sūtra connected with the Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā appears to be the oldest. Among the remaining three, the Baudhāyana is taken to be older than the Āpastamba and the Bhāradvāja Śrauta Sūtra.³

The Grhya and the Dharma Sūtras form an important check for the social life of the later Vedic period, as they are the storehouse of all that is included under custom.⁴ The numerous ceremonies applicable to the domestic life of a man and his family are given in the Grhya

¹ Macdonell, HSL, p.36,38.

² ibid., p.245.

³ Keith - RPVU, I, p.28.

⁴ ibid., p.29; Kane P.V. - Hist. of Dharmashastra, I, pp.11-12.

Sūtras. As the domestic ritual does not form part of the Brāhmanas,¹ the authors of the Grhya Sūtras, when systematizing the daily observances had only the floating popular tradition to draw upon.² The Grhya Sūtras are later than the Śrauta Sūtras as treatises, but the material of the former is probably equally old.³ One of the oldest and the most interesting works of this class is the Gobhila Grhya Sūtra current among the followers of both the schools of the Sāmaveda.⁴ The Pāraskara Grhya Sūtra, assigned to the Vājasaneyī Samhitā and closely connected with the Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra, had considerable influence on the Yājñavalkya Smṛti. The Mānava Grhya Sūtra is noted for its reference to the worship of the Vināyakas which is not mentioned in the other Sūtras.⁵

¹ SBE, 30, pp.XIV, XVIII; Grhya fire and grhya offerings as pāka-yajñas are known to the TS and the Brāhmanas. TS-I.7.1.3; SB - XI.5.1.14-17; AB. VIII. 10.

² Macdonell - HSL, p.249; at least some of the domestic rites but not in the developed form of the Gr. Sūtras are contemporaneous with the RV., SBE, 30, pp.IX, X.

³ Weber thinks that the Brāhmanas, more concerned with exercising political influence, left the domestic ritual and customs in their ancient forms, HID, p.19.

⁴ Macdonell - HSL, p.250.

⁵ Macdonell - ibid, p.250-51.

The Kauśika Sūtra assigned to the Atharvaveda, in addition to laying down rules for the more important domestic rituals, deals with other magical practices connected with its Veda.¹ Jointly with the Atharva-veda it supplies almost a complete picture of the life of an average Vedic man.

Unlike the Brāhmanas and the Upaniṣads a sacred character was not attributed to the Kalpa Sūtras. This is taken to suggest that the Sūtras originated for compressing the sacrificial and the domestic ritual and to record the ancient customs in order to meet the challenge of the rival creeds.² This sets a limit to their composition approximately between 400 B.C. and 200 B.C.³

As a priestly lore, the Vedic literature cannot be regarded as exhaustive. Allusions to works and opinions that are not found in the extant literature indicate that the surviving collections represent only part of an extensive intellectual activity.⁴

The sources may therefore be described as the anthologies of

¹ Keith - RPVU, I, p.28.

² Müller - HASL, p.260, cf. p.107; Weber - HIL, p.20; Macdonell - HSL, p.244.

³ Keith, RPVU, I, p.28; Veda of the Black Yajus, I, pp. XLV, XLVI; RV. Brāhmanas, p.44; Hopkins - CHI, I, p.249.

⁴ Müller - HASL, p.37, 105-107; ŚB, XIII.3.1.1; Śān.ŚS - XVI.1. Āś. ŚS - X.7.

The establishment of the caranas or the Vedic schools, based on variants in the Samhitās, or differences in the Brāhmanas and the Sūtras point to such activity.

religious matter, which the orthodox custodians considered sufficiently important to preserve. It may be assumed that the criteria for inclusion were not merely poetical elegance, conceptual excellence, importance for ritual practices, ~~or~~ the numerical strength or the social eminence of the followers of a particular belief. Many other factors besides these must have prompted the successive redactors to incorporate new material or omit the old. In this connection one cannot overlook the human factor - the feelings of ambition and jealousy. It is quite probable that these feelings found expression at different levels and influenced the inclusion or omission of different thought-streams and rites at various stages of redaction or revision.¹

This broad chronology of the sources should suffice for the study of the sacerdotal class, which involves a general analysis of the religious concepts and the social institutions. For the purpose of interpretation the literary sources should be regarded as part of a vast mass of floating traditions of various families

¹ cf. the inclusion of the Vrātya book in the Atharva-veda. The works and names of most of the old caranas became extinct after the Sūtra period, Müller, HASL, p.368. Similar process may also be surmised for the earlier period.

and tribes whose creeds, ritual and culture were subjected to tremendous pressures, that led to inevitable compromise and adjustment. The Vedic literature, if viewed as a whole and in a broad perspective, would give an insight into the thoughts and motives of its authors and transmitters.

CHAPTER III

Vedic Society

The priests form an integral part of religion by virtue of their function as mediators between divine beings and laymen, as interpreters of religious beliefs and as officiants at ritual. At the same time they represent an important part of the social structure, and are therefore as much liable to the pressures of social and cultural changes as the rest of their fellow beings. To assess the influence they exert on society, and to trace the tensions they create or are subjected to, it becomes necessary to examine the priests in a social and religious background.

Though religion shows a tendency to be ultra-conservative and is prone to preserve its early form, it cannot resist for long the pressures of a changing society.¹ Social, political or cultural innovations cause modifications in creeds and cultus. This is especially the case in a growing plural society, as the assimilation of groups of varied cults is accompanied by the unavoidable incorporation of some of their alien beliefs and ritual. This is amply illustrated by the Vedic religion, which is far from being a fixed revelation. The beliefs that appear in the

¹ Religion though conservative has to admit modifications and changes to remain in harmony with the progressive society. The evidence from the European countries about the time of the Industrial Revolution and from the present Asiatic societies supports this assumption.

Rgveda are neither uniform nor static, but display historical progress, and are also open to modification and growth through environmental changes.¹ That the Vedic religion ultimately yielded to the pressure of social and cultural change is evident from its post-Vedic form. As these changes are likely to have affected the Vedic priesthood, it is necessary to investigate the social structure, collective belief and cultural pattern of the tribes among whom Vedic priesthood had developed. A correct estimate of the culture and the social conditions is possible only with reference to the contributory factors in the formative period. The religious and social history of the Vedic period does not really begin with the Rgveda; its roots are deeper and reach further back into the remote past both outside and in India. Comparative religion and mythology trace some of the Rgvedic gods and myths to the Indo-Iranian and the Indo-European periods.

Study of ideas in the Vedic period reveals that the thought-system of the Rgveda underwent great modification. This was not entirely due to natural development, but is the outcome of the synthesis of various forces and different strands and thus leads to

¹ cf. Müller - HASL, p.530

the inference that the modifications were the result of the intermingling of the Aryan and the indigenous conceptual systems.

The rich and composite Indo-Aryan beliefs, augmented during their migratory period, were finally shaped by the interaction of the prevailing indigenous cults in the early home of the Indo-Aryans. The indigenous beliefs also were by no means uniform. They too were composite and included features like the worship of the Mother Goddess, that was widespread in Western Asia.¹ The peculiar situation of India not only helped the continuation of the west Asiatic culture-patterns in the north-western regions, but also promoted their typically Indian development. The material evidence in India can therefore be better understood in relation to the culture patterns which prevailed in Western Asia.

North West India, on account of its geographical position had become a meeting place of various races. The attractive and the expulsive forces that influence migrations worked in the same direction in determining the movement of people from Asia into India.² The available archeological and literary evidence shows that the Indo-Aryans, the authors of the Rgvedic hymns, appeared

¹ Wheeler - Ind.Civ, pp.89-90.

² Rapson - CHI, p.37; Hutton - CI., p.1.

comparatively late in this succession of migrations and invasions^s. They are said to have been preceded by the Negritos, the proto-Australoids and the Mediterranean races, all of whom had made their contribution towards the development of the Indus culture. Some of the prominent features of later Indian culture, especially the religious tendencies and social structure, that are not found in the early Vedic literature, may be inferred to have evolved in the Indus civilization.

The influx of races into India seems to have followed a general pattern. The incoming races spent much of their force in the initial clashes, and as they proceeded further they merged into the existing religious and social set up, which in its turn was made up of various aggregates. The incoming races, however self-sufficient or superior, were bound to be drawn together with the indigenous population in productive and distributive activities essential for everyday needs. In all likelihood this type of association helped the evolution of a social pattern capable of absorbing new elements and at the same time allowing the coalescing groups to retain their identity. The resulting plural society provided a social scheme, into which the successive migrating and invading tribes continued to blend, thus adding to the main cultural traits. It is reasonable to suppose that the continuous blending and contribution of the various races resulted

in a common pool of certain basic ideas and beliefs, which acted as the guiding force for further assimilation. Absorption of new concepts, beliefs or rites could not possibly be mechanical. Ideas, like languages, evolve rules of their own according to which loan ideas are modified and accepted into the existing scheme without drastically affecting the basic values. Thus those concepts and values only, which correspond to the existing ones in the main stream are likely to be imbibed. Traces of this blending can already be discerned in the Indus civilization,¹ especially in the integration of the population, which comprised various ethnic strains² and probably followed varied cults. Continuation of this process of blending of concepts and cultures is confirmed by the Vedic literature.³

The cultures that contributed to the emergence of the collective beliefs, modes of worship and the cardinal concepts of Hinduism towards the close of the Vedic Age appear to have been the indigenous cultures of North West India, and the Indo-Aryans. The contribution of the Aryans is obvious from the Vedic literature,

¹ Economic unity is believed to have found expression in unity of material culture, religion, script and presumably speech, Childe, V.Gordon - NLMAE, p.206.

² Childe - ibid, pp.208-9.

³ Chatterji, S.K. - Ved.Age, pp.161,164.

which also contains hints of the beliefs of the non-Aryans.¹

In the hymns of the Rgveda, Indra often, and Agni sometimes, are called puramdara² and described as destroying the enemy forts.³ On the discovery of the ruins of Mohenjodaro and Harappa these descriptions were assumed to refer to the Indus people and their settlements.⁴

The probable history of this civilization described as one of the greatest nameless kingdoms of Western Asia,⁵ is pieced together from the ruined city sites and other material remains found in the course of excavations. The culture flourished for many centuries⁶ over a vast area⁷ without any material change in its products. The uniform standard maintained throughout is highly suggestive of the

¹ cf. Bhandarkar - Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture, p.2.

² Indra - I.102.7; III.54.15; V.30. II; Agni - VI.16.14; VII.6.2; both - I.109.8.

³ I.53.7,8; II.20.7,8; III.34.1; etc.

⁴ Wheeler - Ind.Civ, p.100; AI, no.3, 1947, p.82; cf. Sharma, G.K. - The Excavations at Kausambi, Allahabad, 1960, pp.6-10.

⁵ Piggott - PHI, p.135.

⁶ The approximately ascribed dates are from circa 2500 B.C. to circa 1500 B.C. At least seven hundred years are allotted to Mohenjodaro on the basis of rebuildings.

⁷ Significant elements of Harappan culture have been discovered at over sixty sites, notable among these are Lothal and Kalibangan; Wheeler - Ind.Civ. pp.2,102-103.

extreme conservatism of the Harappan culture.¹

The material elements of the Indus civilization are generally believed to have disappeared after the Aryan onslaught, though many of the ideal elements permeated the Aryan society and exerted a strong influence in moulding its philosophy and cult. The recent findings of variant or marginal Indus sherds from many sites in Kathiawad and especially by those from Alamgirpur a village near Meerut in the Jamuna basin,² reveal that the Aryans must have encountered remnants of Harappan culture in the region.³ which later became the stronghold of their tradition.⁴ Here the Vedic literature, cult and the system of caste assumed its final

¹ Harappan tools retain their primitive features in spite of trade relations with Mesopotamia, where axes and tools mark decisive technological advance. Different strata of rebuildings also show little appreciable change, Piggot, PHI, pp.141-2.

² Arch., 1958-59; pp.50-55; Wheeler-Ind.Civ., p.104

³ Evidence from the Ganga valley suggests that the Harappan people and techniques had spread eastwards, Piggot - PHI, p.241.

⁴ dhruvā madhyamā dik of the Brāhmaṇas.

form.¹ It thus appears that the process of cultural diffusion was not confined to the Panjab, the early home of the Aryans, but continued in the formative region and period of the Hindu civilization.

It is difficult to form an idea, from the archeological remains of the Indus civilization, of the customs and religious beliefs that exerted such influence on the Aryans. An idea of the structure and components of the Harappan society will help to reconstitute its religion to some extent. It is obvious from the skeletal remains that the great cities sheltered a mixed population.²

¹ The ruins of Hastinapur, a celebrated city in the Mahābhārata, that lie in this region, are associated with the Painted Grey Ware connected with the Aryans, and found at a large number of sites along the dried up valleys of the river Saraswati in the Panjab and the Uttar Pradesh AI., Nos.10 & 11, 1954-55, pp.147-8. The ruins would indicate that the Aryans had taken the idea of building cities from the preceding culture. For the city Asandivant, SB - xii, 5. 4. 2; Vedic literature contains references to enemy as well as Aryan fortifications. RV - I. 58.8; I. 189.2; TS - 1.1.14.4; VII 16. 10; Cities are also mentioned - Kāmpila - TS VII. 4. 19; SB - xii, 5. 4. 2; Kausāmbī - SB xii, 2. 2. 13; AB - viii, 14; GB - 1. 2; Emergence of great cities in the Ganga Valley is also testified by archeology.

² Basham - The Wonder that Was India, pp.24, 25; Vats, M.S. - Excavations at Harappa, New Delhi, 1940, I, p. 232.

Notable among the various groups as contributory factors to the common culture,¹ were the Mediterranean type and the Proto-Australoids.² It appears that the former occupied a higher position among the Harappans, and the latter were the lowest in the social scale.³

The structure of Harappan society may be inferred from the varying size of the residential buildings, which probably corresponded with the wealth and status of their occupants.⁴ The remains of the uniform one-room units indicate the existence of a servile or semi-servile element in the population.⁵ This shows that the vertical division of society, with wealth as one of its criteria, was familiar to the Harappans.⁶ The great difference in wealth of the citizens is also indicated by the extensive trade that they seem to have carried on. Trade and

¹ Chatterji - Ved.Age , p.161.

² Childe - NLMAE, p.208.

³ Piggott - PHI, pp.148-9.

⁴ ibid, p.169.

⁵ Wheeler, Ind. Civ, pp.24-25.

⁶ Childe - NLMAE, p.175; Slaves were one of the articles of trade between Harappa and Mesopotamia. Wheeler, Ind. Civ. p.94.

controlled agriculture such as were the basis of the economy of the Indus civilization, generally lead to the accumulation of surplus in the hands of a small section of society, thus enabling it to exercise effective control over the rest of the population.

As the population appears to have been mixed and stratified hierarchically, the beliefs of the people may also be expected to be graded and complex. This supposition is confirmed by the sculptures, seals and terra-cotta figurines. Themes which may be explained in a religious context and appear on the seals, or in sculptures provide a clue to the religious beliefs of the higher classes. The figurines on the other hand are not reproduced on the seals or sculptures and may be taken as related to the popular cult. Such figurines are generally associated with some kind of fertility cult connected with the worship of the mother goddess, that was widespread in Western Asia and goes back to great antiquity.¹

It seems that the religion, which had developed some specific Indian characteristics,² also had some affinity^{with} the creeds prevalent in

¹ Wheeler, Ind.Civ. pp.89-90.

² Worship of proto-Siva; reverence paid to animals, especially the cult of the bull; sanctity of trees and so on.

Asia¹ in general and Mesopotamia in particular.² As there is no definite evidence of any direct borrowing between the material cultures of India and Mesopotamia, it is difficult to explain the underlying agreements, especially in matters of religion, as simply the effect of trade relations. Both these civilizations display distinct individual characteristics and the points of resemblance are only common generalities, that may be ascribed to inheritance from a common source. The common stem to which these riverine civilizations seem to be related may be traced to the Irano-Afghan plateau towards which they converge in retrospect.³ Small related cultures developed in the area, which extends from the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush westwards across Iran and Anatolia.⁴ The originators of Mesopotamian culture are believed to have gone from this area towards the south and the south-west.

¹ Wheeler considers Indus religion as a mélange of much that is known of the third millenium Asiatic religions, Ind.Civ., p.90.

² Some of the striking similarities are (a) the representation of a hero, wrestling with tigers, resembling Gilgamesh; (b) The semi-bovine monster similar to the Mesopotamian mythical figure of Erkidu; (c) The trifoil; (d) The symbol of the tree of life and the importance that seems to be attached to the sanctity of water.

³ Childe - NLMAE, p.227; cf. James, E.O. - The Ancient Gods, London, 1960, pp.27-8. Piggott - PMI. pp.143, 201.

⁴ Wheeler - Ind.Civ., p.101-102.

The hills of Waziristan, Baluchistan and the North-West, that are adjacent to the Indus Valley sheltered numerous village settlements. Though marked by local divergences these village cultures, classified on the basis of ceramic evidence, possess certain traits common to the whole area,¹ that point to an element of cohesion between them. The inter-connection between these hill cultures and the two riverine civilizations,² which are partly rooted in them, can only be suggested tentatively at present; but the facts known so far seem to indicate that a further survey of this area will help to establish the conclusion that the region must have once formed part of a cultural continuum that extended from the Tigris to the Indus.³ In spite of local variations, differentiation from a common stem provided an element of cohesion to the cultures of this region. Trade relations⁴ over extensive areas promoted the

¹ Childe - NLMAE, p.272.

² Piggott - PHI, p.117.

³ Childe - NLMAE, p.277; cf. Wheeler - Ind.Civ, p.9;
Harappa civilization was based on some culture which had inherited the early Iranian tradition of the primitive flat copper or bronze axe, Piggott - PHI, p.201.

⁴ Piggott - ibid., p.145.

diffusion of ideas and customs, and thus helped in sustaining the underlying agreement.¹ This may account for the affinity in religious beliefs especially in those of a popular nature, that have a greater hold on the minds of common folk.

Besides the affinity that can thus be assumed between the popular beliefs of the Indus and the other contemporary civilizations and the smaller settlements that lay on the route to India, two aspects of the Harappan society are of significance for the development of the later Vedic society and the diffusion of religious concepts. These are the stifling weight of dead tradition apparent in the unique uniformity of Harappan culture and the seemingly peaceful infiltration of that culture pattern over an extensive area.

Indus civilization, in its comparatively long existence, presents a picture of impressive stability, perfect standardization and clinging adherence to tradition, and a complete lack of any aspiration towards further progress. Some of the sculptures display great aesthetic sense and imagination, but the lasting impression is of a well-regulated machine, which seems to run on its own

¹ Trefoil pattern, not uncommon in Harappan culture and found in comparable associations in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Crete, seems to represent a common symbolism.

momentum till decadence sets in.

This description is comparable to the effects of the caste system. It does not mean that the system of caste as it is depicted in the later literature existed in pre-Vedic India, but the development of some such social system on similar lines may be expected in the kind of society, which may be expected in the Indus civilization.

Different components of the Indus society seem to have been welded into a harmonious whole conducive to peaceful coexistence. It can be inferred that the pattern of this civilization precluded great movements, political or social. It is also suggested that the theory of transmigration and the karman, useful for explaining the apparent inequity between the different classes, is non-Aryan and may have prevailed in some form in the Indus civilization.

If the system of caste is understood to mean a pattern of society composed of different groups, each with its respective privileges and obligations,¹ each preserving its customs and beliefs, and contributing its share to the general culture², it is

¹ Leach, E.R. - 'What should we mean by caste' introduction to Aspects of caste in South India, Ceylon and N.W. Pakistan, p.7.

² Sociologists lay stress on endogamy, occupation and rank when defining caste. The smallest group is traditionally the basis of endogamy and of social and ritual life, Srinivas, M.N. Caste in Modern India, 1962, pp.3-4.

quite reasonable to expect this pattern in the Indus society. The seemingly composite nature of Harappan society supports this assumption, as one of the functions of caste system is to weld different units into an integrated whole.¹

The striking conservatism of the Harappan culture is similar to one of the drawbacks of caste, which imposes a mental attitude² that starts men on the road to progress but arrests their advance midway.³ Caste stifles progress and imparts an almost paralysing stability to economic life⁴ by determining occupation through status and eliminating the spirit of competition. It also minimizes the expression of discontent that the masses may feel and thus acts as a political stabilizer.⁵ The idea of purity and

¹ Hutton - CI, p.119.

² Bose, Pramath Nath - History of Hindu Civilization during the British Rule, quoted from Hutton, CI. p.123.

³ This results from passing on of arts and crafts from father to son, which assures continuity, but makes any innovation in the methods almost a sin against the ancestors. cf. ~~above~~ p.83, n.1 ~~above~~. Indus craftsmen are described as "working within narrow limits and fossilized over centuries into a rigid mental prison", Piggott - PHI., p.202.

⁴ Hutton - CI., p.124; cf. Leach - op.cit., p.5. The words used by Piggott to describe Harappan products are 'competent dullness' and 'stagnation and uniformity' (PHI. 142, 202.

⁵ Hutton - CI, p.120; cf. Piggott - PHI, pp.202-3.

pollution which plays a central role in determining the distance of one caste from another is almost non-existent in the Rgveda. All these facts taken together strengthen the inference that the vertical division of Harappan society most probably included different groups similar to those implied in the caste system.¹

It is not certain whether the infiltration of the elements of Indus culture over an extensive area was peaceful or involved forcible means.² The answer lies in the type of central authority which controlled the administration. In the absence of structural remains of temples or monumental tombs it is also difficult to infer whether the authority that maintained peace and uniformity within the Indus domain was secular or religious. Taking rigid adherence to tradition as a special characteristic of religion, a strong theocratic element is assumed in the Harappan administration.³ The central figure of the administration is thus taken to have been a priest-king⁴ on the analogy of the contemporary kingdoms in Western Asia. The organization and authority presuppose a backing

¹ Hutton - CI, pp.172, 189; Karve, I. - HSI, pp.15, 105.

² Wheeler suggests the possibility of autocratic or bureaucratic citadel rule, Ind.Civ, p.57; AI., No.3, ¹⁹⁴⁷p.59.

³ Piggot - PHI., pp. 150, 201, 203.

⁴ Walter A. Fairservice Jr., considers religion to be the intensifying factor in Indus civilization and explains the fortifications as a protection against the floods, New Evidence & More Theory, p.18.

of force in order to effectively regulate civic life.

The references from the Rgveda also point to the existence of fighting forces and organized resistance faced by the Aryans.¹ Thus it appears that both the theocratic and secular elements were combined in the Harappan administration. This would seem to foreshadow the later Indian tradition which advocates the interdependence of priestly and temporal powers.² Religion in India has always sought alliance with the political head who, assisted by his purohita or the council of learned Brāhmans, was held to be the ultimate controlling authority of the civic and religious life of his subjects.³

It is quite probable that the spread of Harappan culture was affected by peaceful infiltration through cultural

¹ Muir - OST, V, p.471; Large armies are mentioned in RV, I.53.9; II.14.7; IV.16.13; IV.30.20, etc.

² TS. V.1.10; AB. III.11; VII.6; VIII.24; SB. IV.1.4.1. ff; Gau. DS. 8.1; 11.29; Manu 9.322; cf. Bloomfield - The Atharvaveda, p.75.

³ Rulers were emphatically advised to govern according to dharma and to see that the subjects followed their respective duties. Kings also exercised considerable influence in matters concerning caste, Hutton - CI. p.93 ff.

interaction¹ like the later assimilation of alien tribes and groups into Hinduism which did not depend so much on armed conquest as on the presence of the Brāhmans.² This suggestion is based on the absence of any evidence so far that the extension of the Harappan culture involved forcible means, and also on the analogy of the process which has helped Hinduism to penetrate to the remote corners of India. Like many other features of Hinduism that are traced to Harappan culture, the beginnings of this process also may be ascribed to that period.

¹ The word Brahmanization is generally used for the expansion of orthodox beliefs or the assimilation of alien groups into Hinduism. It emphasizes the influence of the Brāhmans as the agents of assimilation, and also implies acceptance of their importance and of the rites and cultus known as Brahmanical. But the word Brahmanization ignores the contribution of the regionally dominant castes and sects. Besides this, Brahmanization is more frequent among the castes of the fourth varna, who are denied the Vedic rites. The word, by implying a one way process, also minimizes the elements of regional cults, which have been accepted in the main stream of Hindu beliefs. The word Sanskritization coined by Srinivas, though more appropriate in certain respects, gives undue importance to sanskrit and neglects the regional languages that play an increasingly important rôle. Caste in Modern India and Other Essays pp.8-9, 44-46. Cultural interaction avoids the narrow connotations of these terms, but fails to indicate the importance of the Brāhmans. This should prove advantageous in examining Brahmanism, as it avoids accepted assumptions.

² Barth, A. - The Religions of India, pp.62-3.

This approximate idea of the beliefs and structure of the indigenous society at the time of the advent of the Aryans in India, shows that the latter encountered a culture, which had achieved a certain amount of homogeneity and was prevalent along the route that they later followed. The religious concepts and practices of the non-Aryans, at least of the popular type, were most probably not completely alien to the Aryans. The passage of the latter through the regions, where culture patterns comparable to those of the non-Aryans prevailed, would have acquainted them with some of the salient features common to the regional patterns, and it is also possible that they had imbibed some of these.

The Indo-Aryans associated with the destruction of the Indus civilization, are an important contributory factor of the Indian languages, religion, culture and the unique social structure. They were a group of related tribes who called themselves Aryans and whose priests composed the hymns collected in the Rgveda. Their ritual and beliefs are reconstructed from the Rgveda and confirmed by comparing them to similar features at the Indo-European and the Indo-Iranian stages of their culture. The elements that cannot be derived from Aryan traditions are generally ascribed to the influence of the indigenous tribes.

On the basis of the similarity of kinship terminology and linguistic peculiarities shared with other cognate languages, the

Aryans are assigned a community of origin with the Indo-Europeans, a loose confederacy of tribes named after the continuum of related dialects that were spoken by them.¹ The dialects are classified according to the region of their probable original prevalence. Among these dialects the Indo-Iranian, ancestor of the Vedic language, is assigned to the central group to which the sat⁹gm dialects also belong.²

The migrations of the tribes speaking the Indo-Iranian dialects are traced on the basis of divergences from the primitive norm and the points of similarity with other languages. These tribes seem to have migrated at a comparatively late date from South Russia, the extreme east of The Indo-European domain. The close relation of the Indo-Iranian with the Finno-Ugrian suggests that the former developed in this region.³ The second phase of

¹ The original home of the Indo-Europeans is taken to be central Europe extending from the Rhine to central and South Russia, Burrow - SL., pp.9-11; or the great steppeland stretching from Poland to central Asia, Basham - The Wonder That Was India, p.29.

² In addition to being directly in contact with the languages of this group and the Greek language which had special affinity with the central group, Indo-Iranian was also in touch with the dialects that turned into Tocharian, and had close relations with Balto-Slavic. Burrow - Ibid., pp.13-4.

³ Burrow - ibid., pp.25-6.

migrations seems to have taken these tribes towards the near-East, where they appear to have concentrated in Russian Turkestan.¹

An Aryan language and religion in a form closely resembling those which are known from the Rgveda was current in the near-East approximately during the period circa 1500 B.C. to 1300 B.C. This was most probably a third independent branch of the Indo-Iranian which would seem to have migrated to the Mittanian kingdom of North Mesopotamia, and settled in areas affected by Mittanian political and cultural expansion.² The tribes who later developed the Indo-Aryan and the Iranian languages separated here and penetrated into India and Iran, and continued the development of their respective religion, culture and language in comparative isolation subject to indigenous influences.

¹ The region formed part of a series of cultures in Persia and Turkestan, which show significant relationship between themselves and can be equated in date with the Mesopotamian sequence, Piggott - PHI, p.61; Burrow - SL., p.30.

² Though the language of the Kassites has no connection with the Aryan or the Indo-European, traces of the Aryan are found among the documents of the Kassites. Surias name of a god occurs with the Babylonian equivalent. Words resembling sanskrit terms for horse occur in the Akkadian text of the Nuzi documents. WZKM, Vol. 53, 1957, pp.181 ff.; Vittore Pisani - ABORI, 39, 1958, pp.133-4; Kronasser, H. - 'Indisches in den Nuzi Texten', in WZKM, 53, 1957, pp.181 ff.

The approximate date of the arrival of the Aryan tribes in India is roughly inferred to be between circa 1700 B.C. to circa 1400 B.C. on the basis of the archaeological evidence from Western Asia and North West India.¹ and the available linguistic data.² The philological evidence also indicates that these tribes came in successive phases and not simultaneously. The dialectal differences, preserved in the Kafiri dialects of the North-West, in the Vedic of the Panjab,³ and in the later classical sanskrit of the Madhya-deśa,⁴ show that Indo-Aryan had undergone certain dialectal divergences before its entry into India. The Kafiri dialects stand halfway between Indo-Iranian and Indo-Aryan as they agree with the

¹ Piggott - ^{Phil}~~Ibid.~~, pp.213, 240-241.

² Assyrian records attest the presence of the Medes and the Persians in Iran from the tenth century B.C. onwards. The great similarity between the Iranian preserved in a somewhat archaic form in the Avesta and the Vedic language suggests that their separation from their main Indo-Iranian stream was not much earlier than this.

³ Change of l into r is a common feature found in the Iranian, the Aryan of the near-East and some Aryan words in the Finno-Ugrian. Burrow - ~~ibid~~^{SL}, pp.31-32.

⁴ Classical sanskrit preserves the distinction between the two sounds l and r.

Vedic in some respects¹ and with ^{the}Iranian in others,² and have also preserved a more archaic form of some sounds³ than either of the main groups.

These differences would suggest that ancestors of the speakers of the Kafiri dialects were the earliest to reach the borders of India, and were confined to their present habitat by later waves of immigrants. They were probably followed by the speakers of the dialect which has preserved the distinction between l and r, that is the classical sanskrit. Vedic would appear to be the last dialect to separate from the main body, as it shared the change of l into r with the other Indo-Iranian languages before its introduction into India. It is quite reasonable to suppose that the successive Aryan waves were marked by minor differences of culture and beliefs, as they were by dialectal divergencies.

The Aryans were pastoral, but this does not imply that they were barbarians.⁴ Their weapons betray technical knowledge of a

¹ Kafiri retains g which the Iranian changes into h.

² In the treatment of the two palatal series.

³ That form of the sound which appears as ś in Sanskrit.

⁴ Piggott - PHI, p.259.

fairly advanced level, and point to the fact that they were not averse to learning useful crafts from the civilizations with which they came in contact. They seem to have acquired surprising success in two essentials prized by the civilizations of the world ever since, speed and skill in the manufacture of the means of destruction. The use of a horse to draw their chariots which had light spoked wheels with felloes made in a single piece,¹ besides testifying to their superior skill, gave them a singular advantage over their adversaries.

It thus appears that both the Aryans and the Harappans had evolved cultures, which were composite and possessed a homogeneity which distinguished them from each other. The homogeneity in both cultures was modified by a certain degree of internal diversity,²

¹ Singh, S.D. - *Ancient Indian Warfare with special reference to the Vedic Period*, Ph.D. Thesis, London University, 1962, p.103.

² The differences in the Aprī hymns of the different families, and in the ādhāna mantras, TB.1.1.48; special rites and formulae for different gotras, As ŚS-XII.10.1; Funeral hymns of the RV. suggest both burial and cremation. Reminiscences of minor differences in ritual among the tribes seem to have survived as family peculiarities in the later Vedic literature. Keith - RPVU, I, pp.91-2; Müller - HASL, pp.54-5.

for both were capable of assimilation, especially in the lower social and cultural grades, of similar ideas from the series of cultures that were prevalent in Central and Western Asia and the north-west of India. This may account for much of the contents of the Atharva-Veda, which forms to some extent an amalgam of popular religion.

By the time the Aryan tribes reached India, they could have hardly remained true representatives of the Indo-Europeans or the Indo-Iranians as regards culture.¹ It is quite probable that their beliefs and cultus were modified by the cultures that prevailed in the lands of their migratory wanderings or temporary settlements. Similarly the indigenous individuals or tribes who came into close contact with the Aryans as friends or slaves are likely to have been influenced by the impact of Aryan beliefs and ritual. Certain pre-requisites may reasonably be expected to have preceded the reception of the non-Aryans into the Aryan fold. The process may be compared to that involved in the assimilation of animistic tribes into Hindu society.

This process of cultural interaction of the Aryans and the Harappans and the admixture of races may be safely surmised to have begun soon after the first clash between the two cultures. Traces

¹ Basham - The Wonder That Was India, p.233.

of non-Aryan influence on Aryan religion and society become abundant in the later Samhitās and especially in the Brāhmanas,¹ but the Rgveda is generally taken to be comparatively free from the effects of admixture. This is not supported by the linguistic changes discernible in the Rgveda. These modifications in the language affirm that the impact of the indigenous people was beginning to show its effect on the Aryan speech. It is not surprising that traces of linguistic change are more numerous in the Rgveda than those of religious or social modifications. The latter normally take more time to manifest themselves, while the evolution of a language, especially of its popular dialects, is accelerated by alien influences. The silence of the Rgveda about Aryan immigration,² the phonetic modifications in the Vedic language³

¹ Keith - RPVU., I, p.22.

² There is no hint in the Rgveda about the coming of the Aryans from a different country except in a doubtful passage, VI.20.12. Yadu and Turvaśu, two Aryan heroes, are said to have been safely brought across the ocean by their patron god Indra.

³ The language of the earliest hymns shows a considerable change from the Indo-Iranian stage, comparable to those of the Middle Indo-Aryan. (a) A series of cerebrals not found in any other Indo-European dialect, are attributed to Dravidian influence, Wackernagel - Altindische Gr., I, sec. 144; Macdonell - Vedic Grammar, p.8; cf. Keith - CHI, I, pp.109 ff.; Burrow - SL., p.33. (b) Aryan voiced groups are replaced by unvoiced, for example gz = kh; bzh = ps; z is elided. (c) Aspirates show a tendency to be weakened to h. (d) Final consonant groups are simplified, cf. Av - vaxš, Skt. - vāk

and the inclusion of non-Aryan words in the Rgvedic vocabulary,¹ suggest that considerable time had elapsed between the first appearance of the Aryans on the Indian borders and the composition of the Rgvedic hymns.

The linguistic changes are mostly phonetic, due to the deterioration of sound that becomes inevitable when people of different linguistic habits try to speak an alien language. The later Samhitās and the Brāhmanas do not record instances of many more linguistic modifications or additions to the vocabulary other than those already noticed in the Rgveda. This suggests that the composition of the hymns was preceded by rapid linguistic change, which was controlled when the Vedic language assumed a literary norm. Such control over the popular dialects was not possible, so the language of the common people remained more susceptible to the influence of the non-Aryans.² The priesthood and the nobility were more likely to preserve the older forms of their language, but

¹ A small number of words, that do not appear in other Indo-European dialects and can be traced to Dravidian languages, is found in the Rgveda, for example - U^{il}khala, kaṭuka, kunḍa, khala, danda, pinḍa, bala, Bila, mayūra, Burrow - SL., p.386.

² Changes in popular dialect are attributed to the influence of the indigenous population, that had been received in the Aryan fold, Weber - HIL., p.177; cf. Keith, Hist. of Skt. Lit., pp.3-4; cf. the same - RPVU., I, p.18.

even these could not possibly remain unaffected for long. Slaves in general and women slaves in particular must have played an important rôle in influencing the speech of the children in their charge and the speech of the Aryan women.

The rapid change in the language especially its phonetic development, which suggests a pre-Rgvedic Aryan period in India, also pre-supposes ethnic admixture resulting in a blending of cultures. Like the changes in the language, racial and cultural admixture was less restricted among the masses than among the higher classes. A good deal of intermingling may also be surmised in the upper strata of society through marriages with indigenous women.¹ Women on the whole are inclined to be more susceptible to popular superstitions and are also more conservative in their customs and beliefs. They might have been the means of transmitting popular ritual into the stronghold of Aryan orthodoxy - the priesthood and the nobility.

¹ Large numbers of dāsīs are mentioned as gifts to the priests, cf. RV. VIII. 19.36, Trasadasyu offers fifty dāsīs to the priests.

Traces of the influence of the non-Aryan traits on the higher classes are found in the incidental references in the Rgveda to the prevailing social conditions. Destruction of the aliens appears to be a thing of the past, and the hostility that was earlier felt towards them is now directed against enemies in general, who often include other Aryans.¹ Raids for cattle and booty are still carried out, but they are not necessarily against the indigenous tribes only. The references to internecine struggles² would indicate that the Aryans are no longer surrounded by hostile non-Aryan inhabitants and feel secure enough from the common enemy to indulge in battles apparently for tribal supremacy.³ The priests have their own alliances and conflicts like the princes.⁴

¹ The word ārya is used nine times while describing hostility among the tribes themselves. RV - IV. 30.18; VI. 33.3; 60.6; VII.83.1 etc.

² RV - VI. 22.10; VIII. 5.1 & 9; X. 38.3; AV - IV, 32.1; XX. 36.10.

³ The dāśarājña battle described in RV. VII 83.

⁴ The ṛṣi-dviṣ and the sceptics, bold enough to voice their doubts about Indra, do not appear to be non-Aryans alone; RV - VII. 104.14-15, ~~it appears that Vasistha was accused of being anrta-~~ deva and yātudhāna; RV - III.53, contains hints of a three-cornered struggle between Viśvāmitra, his ally Jamadagni, (cf. RV - X 167.4) and an anonymous ṛṣi, who from other references appears to be Vasistha. Ved.Ind., for Viśvāmitra and Vasistha. Chanda, R. - 'Survival of the Pre-Historic Civilization of the Indus Valley', MAI, 41, 1929, pp.1-36.

Such rivalries show that the Aryan nobility is no longer afraid of enemy resistance.

Ārya and Dāsa seem to have become reconciled to some extent, Non-Aryan chiefs are described as offering sacrifices to the Aryan gods and honouring the Aryan priests.¹ Some of the non-Aryan tribes have become sufficiently friendly and dependable to be enlisted as allies.² The Aryans fight against each other, and lack of faith in Indra and hostility to Aryan beliefs is no longer confined to non-Aryans.³ The word ayajyu at first applied to the non-Aryans⁴ is used for the tribes which opposed Sudās and included the Bhṛguṣ.⁵ Though the Purus appear to be devotees of Indra and followers of Vedic ritual,⁶ one of them is qualified as mr̥dhraṇvāc⁷ an adjective generally applied to the non-Aryans.⁸ This shows that the terms

¹ RV - VIII. 46.32.

² RV - VII. 33.2-5; Pusalkar, A.D. - Ved.Age, p.245.

³ RV - X. 38.3, adeva is used for both ārya and dāsa.

⁴ RV - II.12.5.15; VIII. 89/100.3.

⁵ cf. IV. 4.5, jāmim ajāmaṃ / pramṛṇihi śatrūn.

⁶ I. 33.4-7. mp

⁷ VII. 18.6; Bhṛguṣ equal to the gods - VIII. 35.3; X. 92.10.

⁸ VI. 20.10; VII. 5.3; VII. 96.2.

⁹ VII. 18.13.

¹⁰ I. 174.2; V. 29.10, etc.

were losing their particular association and were beginning to acquire a general derogatory sense. Their use for an enemy would not necessarily imply that the people thus qualified were really non-Aryans.

The traces of environmental change become gradually more explicit and numerous in later literature. A verse in the Prthivī Sūkta of the Atharva-Veda describes the earth as bearing people of different speech and diverse creeds in accordance with their habitation.¹ Yathaukasam in the verse seems to be a clear recognition of regional influence, while vivācasam and nānā-dharmānam would seem to point to the assimilation of alien groups, their creeds and customs. People, to whom Vedic literature ascribes a hostile character and whose rites are referred to with disfavour, may be assumed to be the Aryan or the non-Aryan groups whose ritual, though not quite in conformity with the orthodox system, could not be completely ignored. The most frequently mentioned group of this class is that of the Asuras.

In the earlier strata of the Rgveda, the word is a normal attribute of Varuna, whose māyā is often dwelt upon.² It is

¹ AV - XII. 1.45. janam bibhratī bahudhā vivācasam nānā-dharmānam prthivī yathaukasam.

² RV - III. 61.7; V. 63.4; V. 85.5-6.

occasionally applied to other gods also.¹ It begins to acquire a hostile sense in the later portions of the Rgveda,² and its application to the gods becomes rare in later literature.³

By the time of the Brāhmanas the Asuras acquire a legendary character and as enemies of the gods are taken to be supernatural beings. The gods in their constant conflicts with the Asuras are generally defeated in the beginning, but ultimately gain victory by the performance of some special sacrifice. The manner of describing the recurring struggle between the gods and the Asuras and the efforts of the former to be victorious denote that the legend was probably based on reality.

The word asura is more frequently used in the plural in the later strata of the Rgveda.⁴ This indicates that the collective

¹ Agni, RV - V.12.1; V. 15.1; Indra, I. 54.3; I.174.1; Mitra & Varuṇa; VIII. 25.4.

² RV - VI. 22.4; VII. 13.1; VIII. 97.1; X. 53.4; X. 82.5; X. 151.3; X.157.4; X. 180.2; āsura. V. 40.5, 9; X. 131.4; asura is used for Varcin in RV - VII. 99.5; TS - 4.3.11.3; he is called a Dāsa in RV - IV. 30.15; VI. 47.21; Pipru - a Dāsa in RV - VIII. 32.2; is qualified as asura in X. 38.3; cf. VI. 18.8.

³ TS. 1. 6.6; cf. Ludwig - Rgveda, IV., p. XVII.

⁴ Eight times in the plural in the tenth book of the RV.; In the Atharva-Veda three times in singular and thirty times in plural.

sense was gaining ascendancy over the adjectival meaning. The general impression is that the gods and the Asuras belonged to the same stock.¹ The myths in the Brāhmanas make them equally the sons of Prajāpati, though the Asuras are shown to be inferior in some way. This idea seems to have led to the usage of the word asura more as a generic rather than an ethnic term. The difference between the gods and the Asuras, mainly based on the ritual, helped the application of the word to groups which subscribed to a different sacrificial ceremonial than that of the Vedic Aryans.²

The strange conversion in the connotation of asura is explained as probably due either to the religious differences of the Vedic Aryans with the pre-Zoroastrian Iranians³ or to the semantic development influenced by internal causes.⁴ The transition of the meaning of the word from an attribute of the

¹ ŚB - XIII. 8.1.5 - devā asurān sapatnān bhrātrvyān digbhyoṣnudanta.
cf. ŚB - II. 1.2.13.

² See below, pp. 111-112.

³ Ghosh, B.K. - Ved. Age. p.219.

⁴ Darmesteter, J. - Ormazd et Ahriman, ff. pp.266 ff.; (Paris, 1877).
Geldner - Ved.St., I., p.142.

gods to an enemy of the gods does not appear to have become absolute till the time of the Brāhmanas, as the term is sometimes found to revert to its earlier meaning¹ in spite of the greater prevalence of the hostile sense.

The occasional reappearance of the earlier meaning may imply that the change in the meaning was not related so much to the word itself as to its association with the term māyā, the occult power that has potentially a dual aspect.² The beneficial aspect of māyā is emphasized when it is connected with divinities like the asuras Varuna,³ Mitra,⁴ Agni⁵ and Indra,⁶ but the sense of craftiness becomes prominent when māyā is associated with hostile beings.⁷ It is the association with the latter aspect of māyā which makes Asura malevolent.⁸ The Asura who controls the

¹ RV - X. 177.1.

² Grassmann - WR., göttliche Kunst oder Zauberkunst. Māyā is interpreted as magic, see asura-vidyā, ved.Ind., I, p.48; tr. of ŚB - XIII, 4.3.11, Eggeling - The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, pt.V, p.368.

³ RV - III. 20.3; X. 88.66; All subsequent unspecified references are from the Rgveda.

⁴ X. 54.2.

⁵ I. 144.1; III. 27.7.

⁶ I. 80.7; II. 17.5.

⁷ I. 56.3; IV. 16.9 etc.

⁸ The malevolent character is ^{also} stressed by associating the Asuras with darkness, falsehood and error as opposed to the gods. cf. Oldenburg - Rel. des. Veda, p.160; n.2.

beneficent māyā is divine, but the Asura whose māyā is full of guiles is hostile.¹ The word occurs in both these meanings in the later portions of the Rgveda where it is applied to individual opponents of the Vedic way of life, who from earlier references appear to be Dasas or Dasyus.² The plural form of the word denotes the enemies of the gods in general. By the time of the Atharva-veda, the hostile sense becomes the normal meaning of asura.

The description of the defeat of the Asuras by the gods as an event of great antiquity³ may suggest that the name asura was in all probability applied to a previous wave of Aryans,⁴ who had minor ritualistic differences.⁵ The word pūrva-deva cited as a

¹ V. 63.3.7.

² see above, p.108, n.2.

³ AV - IX. 2.17; XII. 1.5;

⁴ Shastri, ~~Dr.~~ Mangala Deva - Bhāratīya saṃskṛti kā vikāsa, p.3.

⁵ Differences in the mode of making the graves are mentioned in ŚB. XIV.8.2.1. The asura ritual appears to be similar to the Vedic in its broad outline, the differences being confined to details, AB. VII. 5. (asuravad yajñam tanvīta). Asuras are said to have Kustā in opposition to Aditi, MS, IV. 2.3; Daivya is their messenger in place of Agni, Keith - RPVU, I, p.233. Dābhi is their address for the Gāyatri metre, TS, II. 4.3; MS, II. 4.11.

synonym of asura in the Amara-kośa also strengthens this inference.¹ It is possible that modifications in ritual resolved the actual distinction, and the original Asuras became a legend of mythology. It seems that in spite of the mythical character of the Asuras, the groups that culturally or ritualistically differed from the Vedic Aryans continued to be classified under the term asura. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa² refers to the speech of the Asuras and has preserved an āsura word helayah, that may be the Prakritic version of the Vedic herayah. The change of r into l points to an eastern dialect,³ and the association of the Asuras with eastern regions is also indicated by the epithet āsurya applied to the easterners.⁴ The sense of disapproval is apparent from the use of the adjective āsura freely employed for ritual of which the priests did not approve.⁵

¹ AK, I. 1.12; The word also occurs in Dāmanyādi Gaṇa that enumerates the āyudhajīvins under Pāṇini IV, 4.123.
cf. Agravala, V.S. - India as known to Pāṇini, p.447.

² ŚB - III, 2.1.23, 24;

³ Ved.Ind., II, pp. 181, (mleccha); 279 (vāc, n.7); 517 (vāc).

⁴ ŚB - XIII, 8.1.5.

⁵ AB - II, 5; II, 22; IV, 36.

Among the Asuras mentioned by name,¹ Asita Dhānva occupies an important position. On each day of the preliminary ceremonial of the horse sacrifice a leader, his followers and the source of their sacred knowledge are mentioned as receiving special attention. The Asuras referred to in this connection are coupled with the usurers, Asita Dhānva is mentioned as their ruler and their Veda is given as māyā.² Asita, a mythical sage, figures as a magician in the Atharva-veda with Gaya³ and Jamadagni,⁴ familiar from the Rgveda. The Asuras have their preceptors⁵ and priests. Kirāta and Ākuli are referred to as Asura Brāhmans in an interesting legend, which describes how Indra had to appear as a Brāhman in order to outwit them.⁶ This also hints at the

¹ cf. Aruru, Aru, and Etadu comparable to Arurmaghas, the foes of Indra, Keith considers Kalakañjas mentioned in TB, I. 1.2.4-6, to be more important, RPVU - I, p.233; Svarbhānu, who eclipses the sun and is overthrown by Atri or Indra is an Asura, ibid, p. 235

² ŚB - XIII, 4.3.11; Āś. ŚS, X.7.7 uses the word asuravidyā as an equivalent of māyā.

³ AV - I, 14.4.

⁴ AV - VI, 137.1; Val. T. I., I., p.47.

⁵ Śukra Uśanas.

⁶ For the same in a later period, Vis. P. - II, 4.69-70; cf. Bhandarkar - SAIC, p.48.

possibility that there were different kinds of Brāhmans.¹ The scheme of the four āśramas is attributed to Kapila son of an Asura Prahlāda.²

Later mythology sometimes confuses the gods and the Asuras. Viśvarūpa the son of Tvastr, who is slain for his cows by Trta and Indra, though akin to the Asuras appears as the purohita of the gods.³ The confusion may be the result of incorporating into the Vedic tradition the myths and legends of the people grouped under the general term asura.⁴

The word sarpa occurring in connection with Vedic hymns and ritual, would seem to indicate another assimilated group or tribe whose priests appear to have gained the status of Vedic rsis. A hymn of the late tenth book of the Rgveda is ascribed to a sarpa Jaratkāru Airāvata.⁵ The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa mentions in the course of the Aśvamedha preliminaries one Arbuda Kādraveya as the ruler of snakes and snake charmers, and quotes sarpa-vidyā as their

¹ PB - XIII, 12.5; ŚB - I, 1.4.16; JB - III, 168 ff.

² Bau. DhŚā. II, 6.29 -30.

³ TS - II, 5.1.1.

⁴ Panis are called Asuras, Br.Dev. VIII, 24; cf. Sāyaṇa on X, 108.2.

⁵ X, 76.

Veda.¹ Arbuda Kādraveya is also mentioned as the composer of a late hymn of the Rgveda.² The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa refers to Arbuda Kādraveya in connection with the Soma ritual as a sarpa rsi and composer of mantras, and explains arbudodāsarpanī, a portion of the sacrificial compound, as named after him.³ It was found that the hymns of this rsi made the Soma intoxicating to the gods, and other hymns had to be prescribed to remove the evil effects upon Soma of his mantras.

It is not clear if Arbuda Kādraveya is connected in any way with ~~the~~ Arbuda who is mentioned with Ahi or Vṛtra in the Rgveda.⁴ The hostility of Arbuda to Indra and his worshippers is obvious, as Indra is said to have cut off the head of Arbuda.⁵ If this myth has any basis of reality the followers of Arbuda would seem to have been later reconciled to the Aryan faith. The reference to rsi Arbuda in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa suggests that the mantras composed by him were accepted, and though considered efficacious, were not respected.

¹ SB 40XIII, 4.3.9; cf. GB -1.1.10; Asv.ŚS - X.7.7.

² X.94.

³ AB - VI.1.

⁴ SV-I. 51.6; II. 11.20, etc.

⁵ SV-X. 67,12; cf. VIII.32.3.

An important illustration of the assimilation of non-Vedic groups into the Vedic society are the Vrātyas, the enigma that the scholars have been trying to solve¹ since the translation of the Vrātya stomas by Weber.² The main sources for the Vrātyas are the fifteenth book of the Atharva-veda, the Pañcavimśa³ and the Jaiminiya⁴ Brāhmanas, and the Śrauta Sūtras of Kātyāyana,⁵ Lātyāyana⁶ and Āpastamba.⁷ Scholars generally agree that these stomas in the form of ekāha ceremonies were rites to enable fallen or semi-civilized individuals and groups to enter the Vedic community in general⁸ and the Brāhman class in particular,⁹ but

¹ Hauer reviews the various suggestions of the scholars in his comprehensive book Der Vrātya; Dr. A.C. Banerjea has summarized the opinions of the later scholars in a detailed study of the word vrātya in Studies in the Brāhmanas, 1963, pp.81 - 172.

² Translation of the passages from the PB - XVII in Ind. St., I, pp.33, ff.

³ PB - XXIV, 18; XVII, 1-4.

⁴ JB - II, 222.

⁵ Kāt.ŚS. XII, 1.2; XXII.4.

⁶ Lāt.ŚS. VIII.6.

⁷ Ap. ŚS. XXII.5.

⁸ Weber - Ind. St., I. p.33; Bloomfield - The Atharvaveda.

⁹ Winternitz - Die Vrātyas; Gesch. Ind. Lit. pp.130, 166. Chanda bases his arguments on his interpretation of AV - XV.2.

the derivation of the word vrātya, the ethnic strains and the habitat of the tribes denoted by this term are still subjects of controversy.

The word vrātya first occurs in the fifteenth book of the Atharva-Veda, where the Vrātya, also called Eka-vrātya, is identified with Īśāna and Mahādeva, and on the whole is treated as one of the many forms in which Brahman, the Supreme Being, is celebrated in this Samhitā,¹ Pumścalī, māgadha, usnīsa, pratoda, jyāhroda and vipatha, mentioned in connection with the retinue and the outfit of the Vrātya grhapati in the Brāhmanas, are first referred to in the Atharva-veda.²

In the context of the purusa-medha the Vrātyas are dedicated to the Gandharvas and the Apsarases,³ who are generally associated with laxity in complying with the code of established conduct.⁴ This dedication would seem to imply the censure of the Vrātyas by the Vedic priests for non-conformity to the Vedic ways.⁵

¹ The word indicates 'Supreme Being' in the Ātharvan Upaniṣads, Whitney & Lanman - The AV. Samhitā, II, p.769.

² AV - XV, 2.1-4, explained in Lāṭ.ŚS - VIII. 6.7. ff.

³ VS - XXX, 8; TB - III, 4.5.1.

⁴ cf. Jai. Up. Br. - III, 2.1.

⁵ Bhagvat, R.R. takes 'licentious Aryan' as one of the many interpretations of vrātya on the basis of their qualification śama-nīca-medhra. JBBRAS - 19, 1895-1897, pp.357 - 364. Griffith explains vrātya as the chief of a band of non-conformist nomads of Aryan extraction, Tr. of VS - XXX, 8.

The Brāhmanas add more details about the Vrātyas in connection with the Vrātya-stomas. The word vrātyā occurring in the Brāhmanas and the Sūtras¹ seems to signify the Vrātya way of life and ritual, which was frowned upon by the Vedic priesthood. Those who followed the vrātyā are described as inferior² and deluded.³ The utterances of the Vrātyas, presumably their ritual formulae, are called avrata and amedhya.⁴

The Brāhmanas also enlarge upon the description of the peculiar outfit of a Vrātya grhapati.⁵ The dress⁶ of the Vrātyas suggests that they belonged to the colder regions of the North.⁷ The statement that they did not follow the vocation of a priest, trader or cultivator⁸ is taken to suggest that they had more in common with the warrior class.⁹ This is also confirmed by their equipment, which

¹ PB - XVII, 1.2; JB - II, 222; Āp.ŚS, XXII. 5.

² PB - XVII, 1.2.

³ Bau ŚS - XVIII. 252.

⁴ JB - II, 222.

⁵ PB - XVII, 1.14-15.

⁶ Kāt.ŚS - XXII, 4.11. ff, 21; Āp.ŚS - XXII, 5.5. ff; Lāt.ŚS - VIII, 6.20, 23.

⁷ Banerjea, A.C. - St. Br., p.161.

⁸ PB - XVII, 1.2.

⁹ Chanda thinks that AV. XV.8, indicates close connection of the Vrātyas with the Kṣatriya caste, MAI, 41, pp.25 ff.

is more suitable for a warrior, who most probably combined the functions of purohita and chief.¹

No trace of the Vrātya tradition, the memory of which is preserved in the Talavakāra and the Jaiminīya Schools of the Śāmaveda, is found in the schools of the Rgveda and the Yajurveda. This has led Hauer to suggest that the converted Vrātyas, in all probability, did not accept the Soma sacrifices as the central element of the ritual.²

The contribution of the Vrātyas to the Vedic conceptual system is said to be a kind of theistic mysticism,³ and belief in Prajāpati.⁴ Certain adjectival qualifications of the word vrātya such as garagirah⁵ and the description of their non-Vedic ritual practices resulted in the inferences of Hauer⁶ and Charpentier⁷

¹ Banerjea - St. in Br. pp.96-97. 159.

² Hauer - Der Vrātya, p.335.

³ The suggestion is based on a comparison of JB, I.10; Jai.Up.Br. I.34. AV.VIII.6; IX.6; X.8; X.35 & 36; Hauer thinks that the Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa tries to combine the Vrātya mysticism with Vedic speculations, Der Vrātya, p.301.

⁴ On the basis of the evidence from JB., Hauer - ibid., p.337.

⁵ PB - XVII, I.9; (perhaps 'swallowers of poison').

⁶ Hauer - Die Anfaenge der Yogapraxis; Chanda takes AV - XV.3, to indicate that the Vrātyas practised yoga, MAI, 41, pp.25 ff.

⁷ Charpentier - Rudra-Śiva, WZKM., 25. p.355 ff.

that the Vrātyas were either the earlier yogins or the original worshippers of Rudra-Śiva.

It is possible that the names of Budha Saumya,¹ Dyutāna Māruta,² and Kuśītaka Sāmaśravas,³ mentioned in the Brāhmanas, are those of real individuals of an earlier tribe. Budha, a Vrātya chief, is described as the son of Soma, a simple but effective device to accommodate a ⁱdefied Vrātya in the Vedic mythology. Budha is also associated in another instance that points to the reconciliation between the Vedic and the Vrātya ritual. The divine Vrātyas led by Budha are said to have performed a sattra lasting for 64 days.⁴ The minor sacrifices mentioned in this connection are the same as the components of the Soma yāgas⁵ of the Brāhmanas.⁶

The gradual assimilation of the Vrātya creed can also be traced in the references to the gods in the course of the Vrātya sacrifices. In the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa the gods Isāna or Vāyu are said to be offended at the shortcomings of the Vrātyas in respect of their

¹ JB - II, 222; PB - XXIV, 18.2,6.

² PB - XVIII, 1.7; SB - I, 7.3.1; RV - VIII. 96, is ascribed to him.

³ PB - XVII, 4.3.

⁴ PB - XXIV, 18.6.

⁵ PB - XXIV, 18.2,6, though the word is written as brātya, the context seems to imply vrātya.

⁶ Banerjea, St. in Br., p.141.

sacrifices, though neither of these divinities is elsewhere mentioned as concerned with sacrificial observances. But in the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa the Vedic god Varuna takes their place in taking offence at their unconventionalities.¹

The etymological explanation of the word has been an important factor in deciding the general characteristics of the Vrātyas. Aufrecht derived it from vrāta meaning multitude.² Vrātya is explained as a member of a roving band or fellowship outside the Brahmanical pale.³ Descriptions of the Vrātyas are also influenced by the interpretation of the word vrata from which the term vrātya is derived. Thus Hauer takes the Vrātyas as a group of people who followed the same ritual. S.K. Das, interpreting the word vrata as popular rites, stresses the non-Vedic or non-Aryan character of the Vrātyas.⁴

The earlier scholars, relying on the derivative meaning of the word, recognized the tribal character of the Vrātyas, and generally

¹ PB - XXIV, 18, 2,8.

² Ind. St., ~~pt~~ I, tr. of AV.XV; He also referred to Patanjali's explanation of vrāta on Pāṇini V. 2. 21, and V. 3. 113.

³ Sanskrit Wörterbuch.

⁴ "Man in India", quoted from Banerjea, St. in Br, p.104.

agreed that they were non-Vedic Aryans.¹ The inclusion of the converted Vrātyas into the Vedic community, especially among the Brāhmins, was taken to eliminate the possibility of the Vrātyas being non-Aryans.² Bhagvat put forward the hypothesis that the Vrātyas were originally non-Aryan tribes.³ This is followed by most later scholars, who accept the Vrātyas as roving bands, consider the possibility of their representing the worst elements of society,⁴ and also connect them with the pre-Aryan indigenous groups.⁵

Whatever the outcome of the discussions on the Vrātyas, it is obvious that they represented groups who followed non-Vedic ritual, and could gain admission into the Vedic society by performing ceremonies devised for conversion. As indicated by the contents of the fifteenth book in the Atharva-veda, the traditions of the converted or assimilated Vrātyas seem to have been quite

¹ Weber - Ind.St., Vol. I; HIL, pp.78, 112.

² Ved.Ind., II., p.343; Arguments are based on adīkṣitāḥ santah dīkṣita-vācam - - - - and adurukta-vākyam duruktam āhuḥ in PB-XVII. 1.9.

³ JBBRAS, 19, pp.357 ff.

⁴ Charpentier - Rudra-Śiva, WZKM, 23, pp.151 ff.
Hopkins - 'Gods and Saints of the Great Brāhmaṇa' Transactions of Connecticut Academy of Arts & Science, XV.

⁵ Bhandarkar, D.R. - Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture;
Ghose, N.N. - Indo-Aryan Culture and literature (origins).

influential in the Vedic society at the time of the redaction of this Samhitā. The evidence from the Brāhmanas shows the development of the conversion ritual and points to its being operative, as it could lead to inclusion in the priestly class.¹ The significance of the ekāha ceremony seems to have been lost during the Sūtra period. With the gradual stiffening of the social orders, especially the hardening of class boundaries, admission through conversion seems to have become impossible. The disappearance of the former motives of conversion eventually turned these sacrifices into expiatory rites.² The word vrātya ceased to denote a member of a non-Vedic group who could be absorbed in the orthodox society, and began to signify an individual who had fallen from his rightful place by not performing the initiation ceremony at the appointed time.³

Traces of such assimilation, indicated by the inclusion of the Asuras and the Vrātyas, affirm that the Vedic society was a mixed society, and that the later Vedic culture and ritual were the result of a synthesis of the creeds, cults, customs and traditions

¹ Lāt. ŚS. VIII. 6.29. Vrātya-stomair istvā traividya-vrttim samātistheyuh.

² cf. ŚānŚS - XIV. 73.1-3; Bennerjee - 3rd in Br., p. 172.

³ Manu - II. 39-40; Yāj - I.37; cf. the Rājanya Vrātyas mentioned in Manu, - X.22;

of both Aryan and non-Aryan tribes. The cultural interaction appears to have extended over many centuries and a wide geographical area. The process is likely to have been continuous incorporating customs and rituals, modified in varying degrees, at different levels of society. The situations where people of different cultures co-operated, fought against each other or reached compromises, could neither have been identical nor could have led to similar results as cultural interaction, involving human interests and aspirations, is a dynamic process.

Thus the emergent culture appears to have evolved at different stages. As a result of gradual change successive situations were likely to be slightly more modified than the preceding ones, and the participants in such situations would also be more affected than the common unaffected stock that may be called the hinterland of each culture. During this period, the participating cultures could hardly have remained Aryan or genuinely non-Aryan, as each bore the imprints of the modified ideas of the other culture. Characteristic traits, though traceable to the parent cultures, would also be diluted by mutual influence.

The concepts that appear in later literature and are not found in the Rgveda may be taken as the outcome of non-Aryan ideas modified by the influence of Aryan beliefs. Resistance of the

indigenous population to cultural change under Aryan influence must have been combined with the eagerness to adopt some of the new traits and methods. The fulfilment of pre-requisites, a condition for acceptance in the new society, would imply that the beliefs of the assimilated non-Aryans were already modified by the impact of Aryan thought. Similarly the Aryan ideas and the customs that found their way into the non-Aryan hinterland were also likely to have been modified by the non-Aryan beliefs.

A possible result of this continuous process would be the diminishing of sharp distinctions in the traits which were permeating the participating societies, and were contributing to the general pattern of the emerging culture. The elaboration of Vedic ritual, the changes in the conceptual system, and the reconstruction of the pantheon and the mythology indicate that the priesthood was deeply involved in this process.

The literary records support the surmise that the main contribution of the priesthood was the manipulation of the process of cultural interaction. Like the successful efforts to control the changes in language, some attempt was probably made to control and direct the blending of races and culture. The establishment of religious orthodoxy would be an effective means of accomplishing this. The necessity to impart some uniformity to the doctrines and rituals of the Aryan tribes seems to have been felt when the tribes

settled down in India as social and political communities.¹ The realisation of the threat to Aryan beliefs from the indigenous creeds as a result of the cultural blending and the racial admixture would appear to have strengthened the religious orthodoxy.

It may be safely assumed that, like the pure form of the language that already bears the marks of indigenous influence, the beliefs thus synthesized had also absorbed many alien creeds and rites.² Such synthesis of existing beliefs consolidates the religious orthodoxy by widening the sphere of their application. The establishment of orthodoxy, that is the enforcement of more or less uniform doctrines and ritual by the sacerdotal class, seems to have coincided with the consolidation of the territorial conquests of the Vedic Aryans. It appears that Vedic orthodoxy developed with the Aryan territorial power and became firm with it. The later Samhitās and the majority of the Brāhmanas were redacted in the region dominated by the Kuru-Pāñcālas. The incentive to compilation of these works was in all likelihood supplied by the

¹ cf. Basham - The Wonder that was India, p.238.

² Keith - RPVU, p.12; cf. Brough - EBSG, p.XV.

orthodoxy, which in turn was nourished by the compiled texts.

As the Vedic orthodoxy was established to bring together the varied cults of the different Aryan tribes and thus had to accommodate variations and innovations in the doctrines and ritual, it was led to adopt from its very beginning a spirit of compromise and a tendency to assimilate alien creeds. The need for self-preservation also led Vedic orthodoxy to adopt the principles of compromise and assimilation as its guiding factors in spite of the fundamental conservatism common to all orthodoxies. Inclusion in the Vedic literature of remarks that minimize the significance of Vedic studies and sacrificial performance points to a certain amount of freedom of expression. A compromise that had to attach more importance to the performance of the ritual than to the uniformity of its details would have to allow some freedom to families and clans to follow their own traditional ritual details.¹

As it is not rational for a religious orthodoxy to adopt such an attitude, the influence of strong forces may safely be assumed for directing Vedic orthodoxy to follow a flexible course. These forces may be summed up as the impact of pre-Aryan conceptual system, and also that of the ideas and the beliefs of the immigrating

¹ Keith - RPVU, II, p.459.

tribes who followed the authors of the Vedic hymns.

The priests who formed the hard core of the Vedic orthodoxy seem to have succeeded in establishing their hold by teaching, by formalizing characteristic rites, by forming alliances with influential groups and by incorporating into their system the most insistent popular doctrines and modes of worship. The latter was facilitated by the pantheistic concept of the Supreme Being, which in practice was found to adopt many varied forms thus making it easy to assimilate non-Vedic deities. As the numerous gods of the Vedic pantheon were taken to be the various denominations of the Supreme Being, the non-Vedic gods could also be explained as further manifestations of the same Being. The incorporation of minor ritual details was also made easy by adopting the principle that a particular detail was seen by the gods or the sages or revealed to a king or a priest.¹

¹ AB - VIII.11; SB - VIII.1.4.10; PB - XXI. 12.2.

CHAPTER IV

Vipra

The words used in the Rgveda, for the composers of hymns and the officiants at sacrifices indicate the complexity of the priestly functions. Some of these words imply wise and intelligent men, others denote those who worship and pray, and yet others refer to those who composed hymns or assisted at sacrificial ritual. A semantic study of some of these terms should prove helpful in determining if the notion of Brahmanism had developed in the early Vedic society, and if the priestly and the poetical functions were regarded as exclusive at that time.

The words vipra, rsi, purohita and brahman, taken up for such a study, are fairly representative of the main characteristics of the Vedic priesthood. Vipra is the most frequently used term for the poet-priests in the Rgveda. The word rsi later acquires a sense of sanctity and veneration, and also denotes the exponents of Vedic religion and culture. The office of the purohita later assumed a political significance, and brahman in the form of brāhmana became symbolic of the power, solidarity and the eminence of the Brāhman class.

These words are studied as part of an evolving religion and culture in a plural society, as the concept conveyed by a word is

properly understood not only with the help of its derivation, but also from the textual and situational contexts in which it is used.¹ Etymology is a guide to the original meaning of the words, and an examination of the usage of cognate words and the ideas expressed by them also help to determine the meaning of particular words. But etymology, though a very important factor, cannot be regarded as decisive for fixing the meanings of the words. As the meaning of a word includes both emotion and information, a complete image of the concept conveyed by a word can be formed by taking other factors also into consideration.

The word vipra, which later denotes a member of the Brāhman class,² implies a functionary in the Rgveda, and also occurs as an adjective. Though the authors of the Vedic Index suggest that it means an inspired singer in the Rgveda and a learned Brāhman in the later Vedic literature,³ they translate it as 'Brāhman' when discussing the word rsi.⁴ The importance of sacred learning for a

¹ Br.Dev, II.118, arthāt prakaraṇālingād aucityād-deśa-kālataḥ Mantreṣvārtha-vivekaḥ syād itareṣviti ca sthitiḥ.
cf. Vākyapadīya, II,316, śabdārthāḥ pravibhajyante na rūpādeva kevalāt.

² AK - II.7.2,4.

³ Ved.Ind. - II,p.302.

⁴ ibid., I, p.116.

vipra is recognized in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, when it describes the vipras as the Brāhmaṇs devoted to learning and conversant with the Vedic lore.¹

The word vipra is derived from the root Vip to quiver, and primarily means "an internally animated or enraptured man".² The verb occurs in the Rgveda in the sense of shaking in general,³ or shaking due to fear.⁴ It appears in various conjugational and participial forms, mostly in the causal sense.⁵ In two passages the trembling or stirring is associated with prayer(matī). Soma is stimulated by prayer⁶ and the Asura Agni, animated by prayer, is said to display his strength.⁷ The stimulation implied in these instances is apparently more physical than intellectual, but in the stirring of speech by Soma,⁸ the stimulation obviously refers to the intellect. The idea that songs of praise could lead to ecstatic

¹ ŚB - III.5.3.12; ye vai brāhmaṇā śuśruvāṃso'nūcānāste viprah; cf. Atri, 141-2, though birth may make a man a Brāhmaṇ, he becomes a dvija only through samsakāras and a vipra only through learning. Quoted in Kane - Hist. of Dharmaśāstra, II, pt.I, p.189, n.444.

² Böhtlingk und Roth - Sanskrit Wörterbuch.

³ RV - I.39.5; III.26.4; VII.21.2, etc; All subsequent unspecified references are from the Rgveda.

⁴ I.80.11; V.36.3; VIII.7.4, etc.

⁵ I.39.5; III.26.4; VII.21.2; VIII.6.29; 7.4; 12.2;

⁶ IX.71.3.

⁷ X.11.6.

⁸ IX.96.7.

exaltation appears in the later passages and may be taken to suggest that the poets were beginning to associate exaltation with prayer.

Other nouns and adjectives derived from this root and found in the Rgveda are vip,¹ vepa,² vepas,³ vepistha,⁴ vipodhā⁵ and vipaścit.⁶ It appears from the passages where these words occur that the idea conveyed by them is of rapture or exaltation. Another common feature shared by these words is their occurrence in the hymns addressed to Indra, Agni or Soma.

The meaning ascribed to the term vip and its use are similar to those of the word vipra. Like the latter, vip is associated with lustre⁷ (jyotis), prayer (dhī)⁸ and devotion⁹ (dhīti), and is also included among the synonyms of a "wise man" by Yāska.¹⁰ The usual order seems to be reversed, when the inspired singers are said to offer precious things to Agni,¹¹ for the vipras are generally at

¹ IV.48.1; VI.44.6, etc.

² VI.22.5.

³ I.80.12; IV.11.2; X.46.8.

⁴ VI.11.3;

⁵ X.46.5.

⁶ IV.36.7; V.81.1, etc.

⁷ III.10.5.

⁸ IX.22.3.

⁹ VIII.6.7.

¹⁰ Nigh, III,15, the form that occurs in the Rv is vip and not vipa as given by yāska.

¹¹ III.3.1.

the receiving end. The word vip is associated with ari in three verses,¹ that are obscure and thus open to various interpretations.² Geldner translates vip as 'speech' in these, and ari as 'rival' in two passages and as 'nobleman' in one.³ In these verses vip may be taken as an adjective qualifying aryah, and interpreted as 'inspired'. Vipā, the feminine form, occurs in the sense of speech⁴ and arrow,⁵ and also as an adjective of gir⁶ (invocation).

The words vepa and vepas are of rare occurrence and express the sense of stimulation or trembling.⁷ Vepī, the feminine form, occurs as an adjective of prayer.⁸ Sāyana explains it as 'accompanied with ceremonial acts' which seems unnecessary, as the derivative meaning 'inspired' suits the context very well.⁹

¹ IV.48.1; VIII.1.4; VIII.52/63.7.

² Sāyana on verses referred to in n.1, above.

³ VIII.1.4, hoher Herr, Der RV, II, p.278; The concepts of 'rival' and 'nobleman' are linked as the latter is a natural rival of a common man, Geldner's note on this verse; cf. Beneviniste's suggestion that ari denotes a member of the group into which an individual could lawfully marry, Brough - ESBG, p.XIV, n.1; Banerjea, A.C. - St. in Br., pp.8-31.

⁴ IX.3.2; IX.22.3; IX.65.12; cf. Nigh, I.11.

⁵ X.99.6; cf. Sanskrit Wörterbuch.

⁶ V.68. I, vepī gih.

⁷ vepas - Erregung; zitternde, züngelnde Bewegung, Grassmann; - WR

⁸ VI.22.5.

⁹ begeistert, Grassmann - WR.

Vepas occurs three times, once in connection with Indra and twice with Agni. Agni carries the praise song,¹ and is praised with fervour (vepasā).²

The superlative vepistha is found only once as an adjective of vipra.³ Grassmann understands it as 'begeistertst' (most inspired).⁴ The vipra Rehha, most inspired among the Angirases is said to sing the praise songs at the sacrifice. Vepistha does not seem to imply merely 'the sagest sage' as translated by Griffith,⁵ but appears to point to fervour or ecstasy. The vipra who possesses this quality to the utmost is most probably meant here, otherwise the superlative vipratama, which is twice used in the Rgveda,⁶ could have served the purpose here also.

Vipodhā occurs only once as an epithet of Agni, apparently in its derivative sense.⁷ The word vipaścit occurs twenty five times and can generally be interpreted as 'a wise man' on the basis of its

¹ X.46.8.

² IV.11.2.

³ VI.11.3.

⁴ WR.

⁵ Griffith, R.T.H. - The Hymns of the Rigveda, tr. of VI.11.3.

⁶ III.31.7; X.112.9.

⁷ X.46.5; Sāyana - medhāvino dhartāram; Reden Haltenden, Geldner - Der RV, III, p.203.

etymological meaning 'one who has known rapture'.¹ The latter sense is more suitable in the passages, where the word vipaścit is used with its cognates. Like the word vipra, it is also applied to the gods.

The frequent use of the verb vip and its derivatives by the Rgvedic poets seems to stress the importance they attached to vāc (speech),² and to the composition of hymns.³ The Vedic poets appear to take the latter activity as an attempt to express the feelings experienced during the state of mystic exaltation. At least this appears to have been their aim. But how far they succeeded in achieving it and how the mystic exaltation was brought about is another matter.

The gods are supposed to co-operate with the poets, as they enjoyed the benefits arising from hymn-making. Though the poets are not tired of pointing out that they have chiselled and fashioned the hymns, they do realise and admit that their success in composing hymns, depends to a great extent on divine guidance and inspiration.⁴

¹ Begeisterung kennend, Grassmann - WR.

² I.164.39 & 41; VII.32.20; X.114.7 & 8; X.125.

³ IV.3.16; X.71.2; cf. the explanation of RV. V.81.1, in SB. III.5.3.11.

⁴ VIII.89/100. 10 & 11; X.71.3.

The Vedic poets seem to have made good use of the word vipra and its cognate terms to convey the idea of skill and inspiration in achieving poetic excellence. A combination of eloquence and divine insight appears to make a poet vip, vipaścit or vipra. His compositions are also described as vip, vepī and viprā for they reflect the rapture he has experienced.¹ The underlying idea in all these words appears to be that of exaltation and its expression in words.

The derivatives of the root vip, with the exception of vipra and vipaścit do not occur in the later literature. The meaning of these words, quoted by Yāska among the synonyms of 'the wise man',² is also modified. While vipra begins to denote a member of the Brāhman class; the word vipaścit continues to signify 'a wise man' without any implication of inspiration.

The word vipra is found more than two hundred and fifty times in the Rgveda, where it is of more frequent occurrence than any other word for priest or seer except kavi, which occurs almost as frequently as vipra.

The justification for the formation of the word vipra by the

¹ I.82.2; Bloomfield, M. - The Religion of the Veda, pp.64. 198,205.

² See above, p.132,n.10

unādi rule¹ suggests that it was considered a non-derivative word according to the Paninian view.² This fact, and the alternative roots suggested for its derivation in the commentary of Amarakoṣa,³ support the surmise that the formation of vipra, probably an old word, was not properly understood, and hence it had to be somehow accounted for.

Vipra is interpreted in various ways. Roth ascribes to it the following meanings, 'internally animated, clear-sighted, clever; an attribute of the gods, very frequently applied to Agni!⁴ Grassmann has classified the passages, where the word occurs, according to its different interpretations which are given as internally excited, inspired men, poets or priests; wise, having insight endowed by the gods; singer, poet and so on.⁵ It is clear from the various interpretations that the word had a connotation comprising intelligence, animation and supernatural insight.

Most of the references to vipra occur in the hymns addressed to Agni, Indra and Soma. The word occurs as an epithet of the

¹ Unādi - II.28.1, from the root duvap, substituting i for a.

² cf. Mahābhāṣya, ed. F. Kielhorn, III, p.241, vārtika 5, on Sūtra VII.1.2.

³ AK, II.7.2, roots prā to fill or vip to throw.

⁴ Sanskrit Wörterbuch.

⁵ Grassmann - WR.

gods, of the seers, of men in general and also of prayer. When used in singular, it denotes an inspired man, but its plural form seems to imply a class of functionaries. The word vipra may be interpreted in its derivative sense, like vip, vipā, and vepī,¹ when it occurs as an adjective for mati² (prayer), and manman (hymn of praise).³

An idea of the functions and attributes of the class of the vipras may be formed from the adjectives, nouns and the verbs used in this context. The adjectives qualifying vipra indicate his association with rta,⁴ wisdom,⁵ lustre,⁶ and point to his functions of worshipping,⁷ invoking⁸ and praising the gods.⁹ This is also

¹ See above, pp.132-3

² VII.66.8.

³ I.127.2; VIII.49/60.3.

⁴ rtāvā VII.61.2; II.11.12.

⁵ vedhas - VIII.60.5; IV.2.15; IX.64.23; manīṣin - IX.107.11.

⁶ svaryu - III.30.20; dyumat - VI.17.14; svabhānu - I.82.2; cf. I.182.3.

⁷ arcat - VII.22.4; dāśvas - I.142.2; VIII.43.5; X.25.11.

⁸ nādhāmāna - IV.29.4. VIII.7.30; havamāna - IV.29.4; VIII.7.30.

⁹ grnat - IV.29.4; VII.78.2; IX.43.6; stuvat - VIII.19.12; VIII.74.85,5; jaritr V.43.I.

vacovid - IX.64.23; ukthavāhas - VIII.12.13; vipanyu - I.22.21; III.10.9; VIII.76.6.

confirmed by the association of the term vipra with words signifying praise and prayer such as mati (prayer),¹ dhīti (devotion),² gir (invocation),³ uktha (hymns of praise),⁴ manman (songs of praise),⁵ dhī (prayer)⁶ and brahman (hymn).⁷ Similarly the verbs generally used in connection with the vipras denote praise or invocation or delight, and point to their being engaged

¹ I.86.2; II.24.13; III.14.5; 30.20; IV.3.16; V.80.1; VI.22.2; VII.66.8; VII.78.2; VII.93.4; pramati+sumati - III.33.12; VIII.25.24; IX.44.2; IX.63.21; 85.7; 97.35; 107.24; X.6.5; 25.10; 64.16; 123.1.

² I.22.14; VII.15.9; VIII.12.31; IX.40.1; IX.107.24; X.26.2.

³ VII.80.1; VII.93.4; VIII.11.6; VIII.42.5; IX.43.3; IX.86.39.

⁴ IV.3.16; III.34.7; VI.10.3; X.11.5; X.64.16.

⁵ I.127.2; III.11.8; VII.61.2; X.78.1; X.87.24.

⁶ II.11.12; III.62.12; V.81.1; VII.93.3; VIII.3.18; VIII.6.28; VIII.42.4; IX.17.7; IX.26.1; IX.44.2; IX.63. 20 & 21.

⁷ VII.22.9; VII.31.11; VII.43.1; VIII.6.33, brahmanya.

in composing and reciting hymns and praising the gods.¹

Besides numerous references to their prayers² and the vacas,³ which seem to be the special attributes of the vipras, a sabheya vipra is mentioned as gaining riches by prayer.⁴

Though the significance of sabheya is not quite clear from this verse, its use in the later Samhitās and that of sabhācara, a term with a similar meaning,⁵ may be taken to suggest that the words had some connection with the sacrificial ceremonial. This is

- ¹ arc to praise or worship VII.43.1; VIII.54. vāl. 10;
stu " " I.77.5; I.82.2; IX.3.6;
id " " VI.70.4; VII.94.5; VIII.19.2;
 VIII.49.3; X.30.4.
grī to invoke or praise III.34.7; VIII.91.12; X.6.5;
taks to fashion " V.2.11; VIII.6.33;
hu to offer oblation or
hve to invoke I.23.3; VIII.11.6; VIII.42.5;
mad to delight I.82.2; I.162.7; III.47.4; VIII.12.13;
 VIII.50.9; IX.8.4; IX.86.24; X.120.4.

² See above, p.

³ III.8.5; V.76.1; IX.85.7; X.114.5.

⁴ II.24.13; cf. sabhāsāha in X.71.10.

⁵ Both words denote a man fit for an assembly.

also gathered from the Vājasaneyī Samhitā, which recommends a sabhācara as the victim to be offered to dharma.¹ Though this passage is not very illuminating^{by} itself, the reference to sabheya in the Taittirīya Samhitā is more definite in associating it with priestly activities.² The word su-sabheya occurs with the designations of the three main priests- the hotr, the udgātr and the adhvarvu. The sequence and the context indicate that susabheya should be taken to imply a priest. Max Müller translates it as brahman, the fourth priest,³ and Keith adopts the literal meaning 'councillor'.⁴ But it appears more plausible that the fourth vīra, said to have been produced with the three well known priests through a special sacrifice, was some kind of a priest rather than an ordinary councillor.

If the meanings of sabheya and sadasya are taken to be comparable, the connection of the former with priestly activities may also be supported by the use of the word sadasya

¹ VS - XXX.6; cf. TB - III.4.2.1; dharma is taken to mean 'justice', and sabhācara 'a member of the law court', Ved.Ind, II, p.428.

² TS - VII.1.8.1, sa etam catūrātram ----- tenāyajata tato vai tasya catvāro vīrā ajāyanta suhotā sūdgātā svadhvaryuḥ susabheyaḥ.

³ Müller - HASL, p.92.

⁴ Veda of the Black Yajus, II, p.564, n.4; cf. Ved. Ind, II, pp.426-7.

for the seventeenth priest, whom the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa refers to as maintained by the Kausītakins.¹

The possibility of the analogy in the meanings of the words sabheya and sadasya may be traced to their primary concepts. The term sadas, though primarily ascribed a ritualistic connotation, is also taken to denote a part of the house which probably had some religious purpose.² The latter sense is also possible for the word sabhā, whose multivalence is brought out by the different interpretations based on the same passages. Ludwig tries to prove that sabhā was an assembly of the Brāhmins and their rich patrons, and cites sabhéyoḥ viprah as one of the many passages to support his view.³ Bloomfield, on the other hand, thinks that the word denotes a part of a house in many of the verses quoted by Ludwig to prove his point.⁴

If the similarity in the meanings of sabhā and sadas in the Classical Sanskrit⁵ is taken as a continuation of some common aspect

¹ ŚB - X.4.1.19; Ved.Ind., I, p.113; duty of the sadasya priest was to sit in the sadas as its custodian, Eggeling - The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa^{IV}, p.348, n.1.

² Ved.Ind., I, p.231 (under grha).

³ RV - III, pp.253-6; Ved.Ind., II, p.426

⁴ 'The Meaning & Etymology of the Vedic Word vidatha', - JAOS, 19, pt.II, 1898, p.13, n.2; also see Sanskrit Wörterbuch.

⁵ AK - II.7.15.

in their connotations in the Vedic period, it may be concluded that sabhā, like the word sadas, denoted some part of a house associated with religious activities. This may explain the use of sabheyaō viprah, like the phrase śāmstā súviprah,¹ The expression sabheyaō viprah, like the phrase śāmstā súviprah,¹ may thus be taken to refer to a religious functionary. Though it is difficult to establish that sabheya implied a priestly function, it is evident that the verse lays emphasis on the hymns of a vipra who is described as sabheya. Excellence of speech also appears to be a special characteristic of the vipras from the verse which exhorts them to excel by their hymn (vācā), the vāc of their rivals (aryah).²

That the term vipra denoted a functionary may be gathered from the following verse which contrasts a vipra with an avipra. Avipró vā yádavidhat vipro vendra te vācāh. sá prāmamandat ----- . Whoever sings the praise of Indra whether he happens to be a vipra or not, is said to rejoice.³ Vipra here seems to imply a man skilled in composing hymns and praising the gods, and avipra may be taken to denote a person not properly trained or qualified to perform this function.

¹ See below, p. 144

² X.42.1; AV - XX.89.1.

³ VIII.50/61.9; cf. VI.45.1.

The attributes of such a functionary seem to be implied by the word su vipra, when it is used with śamstr, designation of one of the priests mentioned in connection with the horse sacrifice.¹ The verse expresses the hope that the sacrifice, properly conducted by the hotr and the other priests mentioned therein, may succeed in achieving the desired result. Sāyana takes suvipra as referring to the brahman priest,² on the basis of the sense of superior intellect and wisdom, that he usually attributes to the word vipra. Though the vipras are described as engaged in priestly activities, the word does not specifically denote any particular priest in the Rgveda, while its use as an adjective is quite common. Geldner is therefore justified in taking suvipra as an adjective of śamstr.³

The function appears to have led to some sort of an office, which is referred to by the passage vípram padám Ángiraso dádhanāh.⁴ The Angirases described as holding this pada are especially associated with the vipras. One of them is called a vepistha vipra,⁵ another is qualified as vipratama,⁶ and the

¹ I.162.5.

² śobhana-medhopeto brahmocyte; cf. the interpretation by Griffith 'sage reciter', Hymns of the Rigveda, tr. of I.162.5.

³ der redegewandte Śamstr (Vortrager), Der Rv, I, p.222; cf. his note on the verse.

⁴ X.67.2;

⁵ VI.11.3.

⁶ III.31.7.

Navagvas,¹ a branch of the Angirases, are designated as the seven vipras.² It is therefore not surprising to find them associated with this office.

One of the characteristics of the vipras is their close association with Agni, Indra and Soma. Though they are described as praising almost all the gods in the Rgveda, these three seem to be their special favourites.

The vipras are said to have established Agni.³ They kindle⁴ and strengthen him.⁵ They make him come quickly,⁶ praise him,⁷ adore him,⁸ and attend on him.⁹ Agni is glorified¹⁰ and invoked by the vipras.¹¹ A vipra is said to have composed hymns for Agni.¹²

¹ The Navagvas, said to be ancient ancestors and allied with the Daśagvas, are generally associated with the Agnirases and the legend of winning the cows from the Panis. The word in singular appears as an epithet of Angiras but in plural it denotes a group of nine ancient seers. The latter part of the word is taken to mean winning nine cows or going in a company of nine.

² III.31.5.

³ I.45.7; VIII.19.17;

⁴ III.10.9; III.27.11; VIII.43.4.

⁵ V.13.5; VIII.44.12.

⁶ I.45.8.

⁷ VIII.49.3; X.6.5; X.30.4.

⁸ VIII.11.5.

⁹ VIII.49/60.5.

¹⁰ III.3.3.

¹¹ VIII.11.6.

¹² V.2.11.

That vipra is said to thrive who offers oblations to Agni.¹
 Agni often receives the epithet of vipra,² and is also compared
 to a vipra uttering heavenly words.³

Their association with Indra seems to be due to their common
 liking for Soma. Indra is said to be urged by the vipras,⁴ and
 the hymns which the vipras compose for him⁵ are described as
vipra-vīra.⁶ They praise him⁷ and his achievements,⁸ and rejoice
 with him.⁹ His greatness and power are praised in their domain
 (vipra-rājya).¹⁰

As the word vipra-rājya is not used again, it is difficult
 to comprehend its exact significance. There is no indication in
 the Rgveda that the priestly class had any exclusive residence or
 place of worship, or that the functions of the priest and the king
 were combined. The only evidence, which is likely to supply some

¹ VI.10.3.

² I.14.2 & 9; II.36.4; III.2.13; VIII.43.4. etc.

³ VI.15.4. ⁴ I.3.5, viprajūtaḥ.

⁵ VII.22.9; VIII.6.33; VIII.31.11.

⁶ X.104.1. ⁷ I.82.2; VIII.12.31.

⁸ III.34.7.

⁹ III.47.4; X.120.4. (Maruts as vipras).

¹⁰ VIII.3.4; im Reich der Redekundigen, Geldner - Der RV., II, p.286.
 cf. I.47.10, kanvānām sadasi.

hint for the understanding of the word vipra-rājya, is found in a much later period. One of the stories narrated in the Kathā-Sarīt-sāgara centres round a vipra-matha situated in a secluded region.¹ The adjective vipra suggests that it could not be a hermitage for people, who had renounced the world. The residents appear to constitute a self-sufficient community able to impose their own security measures.² One of them is made a king by a grateful ruler, who had sought shelter amongst them.³

Though not much importance can be attached to this evidence, the story does reveal that places distinct from the hermitages of the rsis, and the villages of the Brāhmaṇ gahapatis of the Buddhist period were not unknown. The question is whether such places were a survival of an ancient convention, or a later development. The similarity of ideas suggested by the Vedic vipra-rājya and the later vipra-matha favours the inference that the latter may have been a survival of the Vedic vipra-rājya, where Indra was honoured.

¹ Kathā-Sarīt-sāgara - 18, 105 ff. vāhyaikānta-sthitam.

² ibid., - 18.127, 324.

³ ibid., - 18.403.

Like Agni, Indra is also strengthened by the vipras.¹ He is said to possess that vigour, which the vipras hope to acquire.² The vipras appear eager to prove that they are his worshippers and wish to remain such.³ This longing for his friendship seems to be prompted by the desire of wordly gain. The vipras, longing for wives, cows and horses, urge him to give them his friendship.⁴ They help Indra in destroying the Panis,⁵ and invite him to drink Soma.⁶ The vipras are said to acquire Soma and vāja by worshipping Indra.⁷

The frequent occurrence of the word vāja in connection with the vipras indicates that they cherished the quality conveyed by this term. The word vāja is taken to mean food, vigour, contest and booty. The meaning most commonly attributed to it may be inferred from the verse, where Bharadvāja prays to Indra to bestow vāja, glory, food

¹ VIII.13.17.

² VIII.70/81,8.

³ II.11.12; IV.29.5; VIII.66.13.

⁴ IV.17.16; X.131.3.

⁵ VI.33.2.

⁶ VIII.21.4; IX.12.2.

⁷ VIII.51.10.

and wealth on the glorious vipras.¹ Vāja, distinguished here from its other aspects, may be taken to mean energy or vigour.

The word vāja is derived from the root vaj, which has the sense of briskness and agility.² Other meanings attributed to vāja are based on the primary idea of vigour that is inherent in the word.³ Vāja is of the same origin as the words ugra,⁴ ojas, ojman and vajra, all of which may be traced to the same root.⁵ These words seem to share the fundamental sense of power, comprising strength, vitality, predominance or influence and energy. The basic idea expressed by the word vāja seems to ^{be} approximate to that of ojas.⁶ It is this concept of vāja, which makes Agni a vājapati⁷ or vājī.⁸ The same aspect of power or illustriousness seems to be implicit in the Vājapeya, a preliminary rite for the installation of a purohita,

¹ VI.17.14; vāja is also distinguished from riches in I.64.13; II.26.3.

² rege sein, kräftig sein, Grassmann - WR.

³ Vāja is that particular generative power, which manifests itself in vegetation, in cattle and in human beings, and by which new food and new life is obtained. Gonda, J. - Epithets in the Rgveda, pp.43-4, 145-6, 181.

⁴ ibid., p.71.

⁵ See vāja in Sanskrit Wörterbuch.

⁶ Renou - RAI, p.19

⁷ IV.15.3.

⁸ IV.15.1; cf. VI.22.2, the seven vipras are said to urge Indra to show his might.

as well as for the strengthening of an already consecrated king.¹
 Unless otherwise indicated in the text, this may be taken as the
 most common meaning of vāja.

Indra and Agni are said to gain and grant vāja by the help of
 the vipras.² Vāja was probably necessary for their functions, for
 the vipras are described as receiving it from the gods,³ and
 offering it to them.⁴ The vipra, urged by Agni, carries away the
vāja of the Panīs.⁵ This may mean the booty consisting of cows,⁶
 as another verse describes the god Soma giving wealth in the form of
 cows to the vipra, who offers oblation.⁷ The vipras praise Indra
 and Agni to gain vāja (vājasātaye).⁸ The Áśvins are invoked by them

¹ Ved.Ind., II, pp.280-281.

² I.27.9; I.129.2; VIII.70/81.8.

³ I.77.5; I.117.11; VI.7.3; IX.43.6. The Gotamas who receive
vāja from Agni are also known as vājaśravas. cf. TB, I.3.10.3;
 III.11.8; Ved.Ind., II, p.282.

⁴ III.27.11; X.11.5.

⁵ VI.13.3.

⁶ The legend of Indra carrying away the Panī's cows with the help
 of Saramā and the Angirases is often mentioned in the Rgveda.

⁷ X.25.11. (gomato vājān)

⁸ VII.94.5.

for the same purpose.¹ As mentioned before, the possession of vāja seems to be one of their attributes, as they are three times qualified as vājins.²

The vipras are very closely associated with Soma, who often receives the epithet of vipra,³ and is also called vipra-vīra.⁴ The vipras are qualified as suta-somāh; (those who have pressed the Soma).⁵ They praise Soma,⁶ clean and beautify him,⁷ worship him⁸ and rejoice in him.⁹ Soma flows, beautified by the praise of the vipra Medhyātithi.¹⁰ Atri, the vipra, is mentioned as an example to one invoking the Ásvins to drink Soma.¹¹ Soma desires wealth for the vipra,¹² and is asked to flow in order to strengthen him.¹³ The vipras receive four thousand cows and a cauldron for pravṛj.¹⁴

¹ VIII.76/87.6.

² VI.7.3; VII.56.15; VII.93.3.

³ VIII.68/79.I; IX.40.I; X.61.16; The pressing stones are qualified as vipra in VIII.42.4.

⁴ IX.44.5.

⁵ I.45.8.

⁶ IX.3.6; IX.17.6; IX.85.7; IX.63.12.

⁷ IX.17.7; IX.26.1; IX.63.20; IX.64.23.

⁸ IX.86.39.

⁹ IX.8.4.

¹⁰ IX.43.3.

¹¹ VIII.42.5.

¹² IX.47.4.

¹³ IX.43.6.

¹⁴ V.30.15; The pravargya or the hot milk sacrifice was performed twice daily in the course of Upasad. It is inserted in the Soma sacrifice by the ritual text books. The mahāvīra pot is heated and the drink is offered to the Ásvins, Keith - RPVU, II, pp.327, 332-3.

They anoint the cauldron set on the fire.¹ Soma is said to have stimulated the hymn of the great vipra Kaksīvan,² who is described in another verse of the tenth book as being made by Soma to rush like a swift-moving wheel.³ The trembling of the vipras and their composing a hymn are also mentioned.⁴ The self-luminous vipras feasted, were exhilarated, trembled and praised Indra with a new hymn. Soma is not mentioned here as the cause of exhilaration, but the sequence in the verse seems to imply the composition of the hymn in a state of trance.

The state of trance and the exhilaration of mind produced by Soma are reminiscent of the ancient cult of Shamanism. The functions generally attributed to the shamans are priestly, prophetic and magico-medical. But their distinctive feature is the ability to produce a state of trance through auto-hypnotism caused by different methods. The knowledge that the shamans claimed about the sacrifices that would be pleasing to the gods, and their power of healing and divination depended on their ability to establish a direct contact with the world of spirits.⁵

¹ V.43.7.

² X.25.10.

³ X.61.16.

⁴ I.82.2, The Maruts are ^{here} referred to as the vipras, Geldner - Der RV, I, p.105.

⁵ ERE, **11**, pp.441-2.

Besides exhilaration of mind, the vipras are also associated with the function of healing. In the later strata of the Rgveda, a vipra is described as a healer and destroyer of evil spirits.¹ The connection of a vipra with healing seems also to be hinted at in the Atharvaveda, where the healing waters are qualified as vipra.² A medicine said to be a better healer than the healers, is also called vipra.³

The similarity between the vipras and the shamans is to be seen not so much in their functions, which may be expected to be somewhat alike among priesthoods in general, as in their capacity to produce a trance, during which the gods were believed to reveal their directions. When describing their hymns, the vipras give the impression that their words are gifts from the gods in as much as they are inspired and stimulated by the deities, especially by Agni and Soma.

This may be taken to suggest that the hymns were thought of as revelations experienced in a trance. The designations of kavi, the wise one, and vipra, literally the trembling one, are applied to the poets who can seize and express these revelations, as well as

¹ X.97.6.

² AV. XIX.2.3.

³ AV. XIX.44.1.

to the gods who send the inspiration.¹ The word vipra suggests mystical quivering not unlike that of the shamans, and somewhat akin to the condition described by the Kashmiri Spanda School.²

One of the traits of the vipras deserves notice in connection with their shamanistic tendencies. They are twice qualified as jāgrvas (vigilant),³ and Agni is once compared to a vigilant vipra.⁴ This suggests a practice peculiar to the vipra, which enabled him to be cited as a standard of comparison. Taken by itself, the adjective is not very significant, as keeping vigil may have been part of his function. But it assumes importance, when considered with another epithet that the vipras apply to themselves. The vipras, inviting Indra to drink Soma, declare themselves to be kinless (abandhavah),⁵ and seek the support of Indra, whom they regard as having many bandhus.⁶ Geldner translates bandhu as 'Anhang' (follower),⁷ but bandhu implies kinship more than fellowship. The word abandhavah seems to indicate renunciation of

1 & 2 Renou - RAI. p.10.

3 I.22.21; III.10.9.

4 VIII.44.29;

5 ohne Verwandte, Grassman - WR.

6 VIII.21.4.

7 Der RV., II, p.325.

kinship privileges, otherwise the loss of kinship in a tribal society would be difficult to explain. It is not improbable that the word vipra-rājya denoted the domain of some such group, who held Indra in eminence.

It may be assumed that some type of asceticism enjoining special discipline and renunciation of social rights was practiced by some among the vipras, who are also associated with inducing a state of ecstasy. One of the methods of inducing trance is austerity which, like the intoxicating potions, leads to visions and intense inner experiences, thought to have a liberating influence.¹ Tapas or the practice of austerity, though it appears in later Vedic literature, is not really a later development.² Eliade suggests the possibility that traditions regarding the means for obtaining magical heat, ecstasy or divine possession prevailed among the indigenous population.³ The suggestion that the system of yoga also might be supposed to have developed from local shamanistic

¹ Singh, J.P. - Hist. of Indian Asceticism in Pre-Buddhist Times, Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1960, pp.18 ff.

² The ascetic in Aryan society was of the type of the Shaman and the magician priest. cf. Oldenberg - Rel. des. Veda, pp.404-6; Keith - RPVU, II, p.401ff.; Arbaman, E. - Rudra, Uppasala, 1922, p.297ff. cf. RV - VIII.59/Va.41.6, yāni sthānānyasrjanta dhīrāḥ -- tapasābhyapaśyam.

³ Eliade, Mircea - Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, New York, 1958, pp.337-9.

techniques, is supported by the evidence from the remains of the Indus civilization.¹

Thus the surmise that some type of shamanistic asceticism was known to a section of the vipras appears to be quite plausible. The verses in which the words suggesting this idea occur are not in the earliest strata, so the idea of austerity would appear to have had time to be assimilated into the Vedic culture. When the vipras lose their identity and join the general stream of the Brāhman class, these traits cease to be associated with them.

The word vipra seems to denote not merely a composer, singer or invoker, but a man who is mentally animated and gifted with supernatural insight. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the vipras associated with the theosophical riddles that were a feature of the sacrificial ceremonial. A series of such riddles alluding to a chariot, a bird and the hidden and mysterious names of the cows, the symbols that later acquire importance, is found in the philosophical hymns of the Rgveda. The vipras are associated with the mystic and obscure activities mentioned in these riddle hymns.²

¹ Chanda, R. 'Survival of the Prehistoric Civilisation of the Indus Valley', MASI, 41, 1929, p.25; Singh - op.cit, p.28-31, 416.

² VII.87.4; IX.87.3; X.123.1,4; X.135.4; Varuṇa qualified as vipra instructs Vasiṣṭha in the mysteries of the pada. Discovery of the hidden and mysterious name of the cows is attributed to Soma, the vipra.

The sages who first asserted the underlying unity of the gods are also referred to as vipras.¹

A distinction seems to have been noticed throughout the Rgveda between people who pursued physical activities and those following intellectual or priestly ones. This is evident from the verses where the word vipra is used as an alternative to the words vīra, satpati and samrāj.

The vipra is also distinguished from the yajamāna. They are mentioned together in two passages. In one verse the singer invites Indra by his new hymn, offers the presence of the vipras as an additional attraction, and expresses the hope that the other yajamānas may not detain him.² The distinction is a little vague here, but becomes apparent in the passage where the seer asks the Ásvins whether they have gone to the house of a vipra or a sacrificer.³ It is clear from the use of vā in this verse that the vipra and the yajamāna were distinct from each other.

The distinction between vipra, and vīra or satpati or samrāj, is obvious in some references and slightly vague in others. One verse refers to the vipras as an alternative to men who come to the battlefield.⁴ The distinction is more clearly implied in the verse

¹ I.164.46; X.114.5.

² II.18.3.

³ X.40.14.

⁴ I.8.6.

which describes that the vipra gains vāja (vigour), and the vīra subdues his enemies when they are favoured by Agni.¹ The goddess ^uDān is said to bestow similar treasures on the vīra who offers oblations, and on the vipra who praises her.² The separating particle vā is not used here, but the words vipra and vīra are used in such a way that they indicate persons employed in distinct activities.

Another verse refers to the satpati (protector of good men), who vanquishes his enemy, and the vipra who carries away the treasure of the Panis when urged by Agni.³ The functions of the vipra and the king and their respective rewards are distinctly marked when the vipra patronized by the Maruts is said to gain hundreds of cattle and the sovereign is described as destroying his enemies.⁴ It is clear from these references that the vipra qualified as devout (dhiyayu) and singer of hymns (jarat) is different from the vīra and others, who gained victory by their might.

The word vipra occurs in compounds as an adjective and generally retains its derivative meaning.⁵ The compound vipra-vīra is an exception, it occurs five times and is used for Soma,

¹ VI.7.3.

² VI.65.4.

³ VI.13.3.

⁴ VII.58.4.

⁵ vipra-vāhas - V.74.7; Vipra-manman - VI.39.1; vipra-vacas - VIII.50/61.8.

jātavedas, prayer and wealth.¹ Ambiguity of the word is obvious from the different interpretations suggested by the translators.² Geldner, whose explanation is more satisfactory, takes it to mean 'one who makes men eloquent', and 'Consisting of eloquent men or sons'.³ Another possible interpretation which also suits the context, is to take the compound word in the sense of 'one who has the vipras as his heroes',⁴ as the words vipra and vīra implied two different classes. This is not improbable as the compound occurs in the later hymns when the two upper classes had more or less emerged as separate entities but the rigidity about their separate functions had not set in.

The use of the word vipra as an adjective is not confined to compounds only. Besides its frequent use as an epithet for the various gods,⁵ it also occurs with words denoting men such as āyu, nr and manus who are described as engaged in honouring Indra, Agni

¹ Soma - IX.44.5; rayi - X.47.4,5; gir - X.104.1; jātavedas - X.188.2.

² Sāyana - 'urged by the vipras, or one having intelligent sons'. Griffith - 'sage and hero, or hero or manly sages, mighty singers', etc., tr. of the verses referred to in n. 1 above, Hymns of the Rigveda.

³ Geldner - Der RV, translation of verses referred to in n. 1 above.

⁴ cf. Griffith - *ibid.*, X.188.2, 'with sages for his hero band'.

⁵ Agni - I.127.2; II.36.4; III.5.1. etc. Indra - I.130.6; VII.35.5; VIII.2.36. etc., Vāyu - V.41.6; Varuṇa - VII.88.4,6; Aśvins - VI.50.10; VII.2.1; Maruts - III.47.4; Soma IX.13.2; IX.13.2; IX.40.1. etc.

and Soma, the favourite deities of the vipras. The āyus qualified as vipra delight Indra,¹ and are associated with the vipras in cleaning Soma.² The vipra men (narah) pay homage to the god Savitr by sacrifices.³ They approach Agni with devotion⁴ and invoke Indra and Agni.⁵ The word narah is not directly connected with vipra in this verse, but the pronoun te used with it, indicates that narah refers to viprāh mentioned earlier. The vipra men are described as cleaning Soma by dhī.⁶ Like the gods and men, Manus also is qualified as vipra. Agni is requested to worship the gods in the same way as he did by the oblations of the vipra manus.⁷ The word vipra in these verses appears to imply the qualities of mental animation and profound insight.

Kārus (singers) also are twice qualified as vipras, when they are described as praising Indra⁸ and Soma.⁹ Vipra is once found with the word sūri in the verse - tvótāso maghavan - Indra viprā vayām te syāma sūrāyo grnāntah.¹⁰ The poet expresses the hope that under the protection of Indra, the vipras may remain his praising

¹ VIII.12.13.

³ III.62.12.

⁵ VII.93.3.

⁷ I.76.5.

⁹ IX.17.6.

¹⁰ IV.29.5; cf. X.115.9.

² IX.64.23.

⁴ VII.15.9.

⁶ IX.17.7.

⁸ VIII.3.18.

sūris. The translators of the Rgveda usually take the word sūri as opposed to singer or priest, interpreting vipra as priest or inspired singer and sūri as one who pays for the services of the former.¹ Following this idea the three words vipra, sūri and grnat are interpreted separately, but there is no justification in the text to do so.² Vipra and grnat may easily be connected with sūri, which does not seem to be exclusively associated with the liberal sacrificer at this stage, and may be taken in its primary sense of bright or lustrous.³ Sūri in its secondary meaning of sacrificer^{also} need not be opposed to grnat or vipra here, as the tradition preserved in the form of Anukramanīs ascribes the composition of many Rgvedic hymns to princes.⁴ Besides, there is no evidence in the Rgveda that such composer-patrons could not be qualified as vipras.

Vipra also occurs in association with the words kavi and rsi.

¹ Grassmann - WR.; Ved.Ind., II, p.465.

² Griffith - 'princes and priests and singers', Hymns of the Rigveda. Geldner - wir Redekundigen - Lohnherren und Sänger - Der RV, I, p.457.

³ From the root suar to shine: der Leuchtende, Glänzende, Grassmann - WR.

⁴ Prthi Vainya - X.148; Manu Vaivasvata - VIII, 27-31, etc.; Mat.P. mentions Kṣatriya and Vaiśya composers of the hymns, 132,98-118; Muir - OST, I, pp.279-280.

These words are used in the Rgveda in a similar manner¹ and seem to denote the same concept with slight variations, which are lost in the later Vedic literature. Identical explanations of the terms kavi and vipra are given in the Taittirīya Samhitā,² and both are explained as rsi in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.³

The words vipra and kavi are used with other qualifying words for the gods and the seers in some passages and are not connected with each other. Agni⁴ and Soma⁵ are qualified as vipra and kavi, and the seer Gaya is said to be a vipra and a kavi.⁶ In some references vipra seems to qualify kavi. The vipra kavis praise the deeds of Indra.⁷ They state that Suparna is one in many forms.⁸

¹ Kavi is used for the gods: Agni - III.28.4; V.21.3; 26.3., etc. Indra III.42.6; 52.6; Sūrya - V.44.7; Varuṇa - VIII.41.5; X.24.7; Soma - IX.7.4; IX.9.1, etc; with mati - IX.64.10; vāc - IX.67.13; hotṛ - I.151.7; dūta - I.188.1; vedhas - V.52.13; Kavitama - V.42.3; VI.18.14.

² TS - II.5.9.1-2, - viprānumadita ityāha viprā hyete yac-chuśruvāmsah. kaviśasta ityāha kavayo hyete yac-chuśruvāmsah.

³ ŚB - I.4.2.7,8 - viprānumadita iti. ete vai viprā yad-rsayah ---

⁴ VI.15.7; VIII.39.9; VIII.44.21.

⁵ IX.18.2; IX.84.5.

⁶ X.64.16.

⁷ III.34.7.

⁸ X.114.5.

Both terms seem to denote men of the same class in the verse which describes Indra as the best vipra among the kavis.¹ It seems that kavi primarily denoted a wise man and could be applied to a composer, singer or invoker, but vipra seems to have an additional sense of mental exhilaration, as the various activities of the vipras appear to be the effect of their feeling of exaltation.

Like the kavis, the rsis are also qualified as vipra.² The ancient and recent vipra-rsis composed hymns for Indra,³ who once identifies himself with the vipra rsi Kaksīvān among others.⁴ The Kuśikas, the vipra rsis, are asked to drink Soma with the gods.⁵ Soma receives this epithet three times.⁶ He is also described as a rsi among the vipras when being compared to the best of the various classes.⁷ This indicates that in some circles at least the rsi was looked upon as a vipra of exceptional power and inspiration.

The phrases vīpratamam kavīnām and rsir vīprāṇām give an idea of the relative position of vipra, kavi and rsi in the hierarchy, if it may be so called, of the composers and singers of hymns. Among

¹ X.112.9.

² I.162.7; IV.50.1; VIII.3.14; X.108.11; a sāma-vipra rsi is mentioned in V.54.14.

³ VII.22.9.

⁴ IV.26.1.

⁵ III.53.10.

⁶ VIII.68/79.1; IX.87.3; IX.107.7.

⁷ IX.96.6.

the three, the vipra appears to be superior to the kavi, but less exalted than the rsi. In fact this slight distinction between vipra and rsi does not seem to be very clearly marked at this stage, as their functions were similar. This is apparent from the hymn where the seer Vatsa is mentioned as a rsi in one verse and as vipra in the next.¹ Another striking similarity between these two is that they are both grouped as seven,² and their groups are referred to in somewhat similar terms. The seven rsis are called 'our fathers',³ and 'gods'.⁴ They are godlike and take up the reins (of sacrifice) after viewing the path of their predecessors.⁵ The seven vipras are called 'our fathers',⁶ and are said to have discovered the path of ṛta.⁷ These vipras assert that they are the Angirases and the sons of Heaven, claim the goddess Dawn as their mother and pray to become foremost among men.⁸

Such groups of seven are common in the Rgveda. The number seven, quite popular and considered sacred, probably influenced⁹

¹ VIII.8.8.&9.

² rsis (seven) - IV.42.8; IX.62.17; IX.92.2; X.82.2; X.109.4; X.130.7. Macdonell takes the seven rsis as ancient sacrificers and thinks that they are meant by seven vipras, Ved. Mythology, p.144; but the group of seven vipras appears to be more ancient. vipras - (seven) - I.162.4; III.7.7; III.31.5; IV.2.15; VI.22.2.

³ IV.42.8.

⁴ X.109.4.

⁵ X.130.7.

⁶ VI.22.2.

⁷ III.31.5.

⁸ IV.2.15.

⁹ Keith - RPVU, I, p.226; Macdonell - Vedic Mythology, p.144.

the numbering of the technical priests,¹ and was attached on that analogy to other functionaries connected with the sacrificial ritual.² It was associated with the sacrifice to such an extent that sapta-tantu (having seven components) occurs as one of the epithets of sacrifice.³ Of all the functionaries referred to as seven, Kāru, hotr and vipra are mentioned as such in the earlier books.⁴ Among these the group of seven vipras seems to be the most popular, as it is mentioned more often than the other two.

The rsis are ^{re}ferred to as seven in the later books with one exception, which is perhaps an interpolation.⁵ The vipras are mentioned as seven four times in the earlier books and once in a later. Thus it is clear that the group of seven vipras is earlier than that of the seven rsis, which increases in importance in the

¹ II.1.2.

² See n. 4 below.

³ X.52.4; X.124.1.

⁴ hotr - III.10.4; III.29.14; VIII.49/60.16; IX.114.3; X.35.10; X.61.1; X.63.7; dhātr - IX.10.3; Kāru - IV.16.3; dhīra - X.114.7; Rebha - X.71.3; haviṣmat - X.122.4.

⁵ IV.42.8; It is the first of the three concluding verses of the hymn addressed to Indra and Varuṇa. The reference to seven sages in connection with Trasadasyu is rather abrupt. The legend of Trasadasyu and its connection with Indra and Varuṇa probably prompted the redactors to add the apparently independent group of these three verses to the hymn.

See below p. 230.

later literature. The general description and the epithets applied to these two groups indicate that the Vedic seers did not consider them very distinct from each other. Similarity of functions and the growing importance of the concept of rsi were probably instrumental in eliminating the earlier group. It may be inferred that the seven rsis of the later books developed from the seven vipras of the family books. A later reference describing seven vipra rsis as attending on Soma,¹ may be taken as an illustration of this process. In this verse vipra loses its earlier association with the number seven and is reduced to a secondary position as an adjective of rsi. It appears that both the terms denoted similar concepts with slight modifications, and signified men belonging to the same class in this Samhitā.

Neither of these groups is individualized in the Rgveda, though many seers are qualified as vipra or as rsi or as both. Names of the seven rsis first appear in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa,² and include the names of persons mythical or real, who were remembered as important contributors to Vedic ritual or thought

¹ IX.92.2.

² Atri, Bhardvāja, Gotama, Jamadagni, Kaśyapa, Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra are included in this group, ŚB - XIV.5.2.5-6; Br.Up. - II.2.3-4.

system. Five of the seers¹ cited in this group and three of the families later taken to be the original families of the Brāhmanas² are qualified as vipra in the Rgveda.

The fact, that individual seers of different families are characterized as vipra, supports the inference that the word was generally used in its primary sense. The seers thus qualified were probably considered competent to perform the functions ascribed to a vipra. The office and functions of the vipras seem to have originated and developed among the Angirases, with whom they are closely associated. But they are not confined to the Angiras clan, as there is no indication in the Rgveda that the functions of a vipra were restricted to any particular clan or class.³

It is evident that, in the Rgveda, the word vipra denotes a class of functionaries, who are distinguished from the yajamāna⁴ on the one hand and from the adhvaryu on the other.⁵ The word, when used as an adjective, implies certain qualities, and denotes a

¹ Atri - VIII.42.5; Bharadvāja - I.112.13; VI.65.4; Gotama - I.85.11; Vasiṣṭha - VII.22.4; VII.61.2; VII.72.3; Viśvāmitra - III.33.4 & 12.

² The Vasiṣṭhas - VII.80.1; the Gotamas - I.77.5; the Kuśikas - III.30.20; III.53.10.

³ Manu, Viśvāmitra and Nabhānediṣṭha (X.61.23), later remembered as members of non-priestly class are styled as vipras in the Rgveda.

⁴ See above, p.157

⁵ III.3.7.

functionary, gifted with profound insight and inspiration when used as a substantative. The use of vipra as an adjective, especially with words signifying prayer and men, minimizes the possibility of its exclusively denoting a member of any specific caste. The priestly activities of the vipras seem to have included tending the fire, composing and reciting hymns and participating in the savanas.¹ Their association with sacrifice is generally in connection with Soma, who is believed to inspire their hymns. As suggested by the derivation of the word, stimulation or exaltation is a prominent characteristic of the vipras in the Rgveda. Their association with Soma thus appears natural, as the latter's efficacy to induce a state of trance and inspire the composition of hymns is well-established. Other gods associated with the vipras, generally in connection with Soma, are Indra, Agni and the Ásvins. Their function of healing also seems to be related to their association with Soma, who is said to be the medicine of the sick.²

¹ X.41.3.

² VIII.61/72.17; IX.88.3; IX.95.2; IX.96.6.

In the later Samhitās and the Brāhmanas the word vipra generally occurs in the passages quoted from the Rgveda, and usually in the sense of a member of the Brāhman class. Though the original significance of the word is gradually lost, their old association with inspired speech and skill in composing hymns is occasionally remembered in later literature.¹ This trait of the vipras also seems to be implied when Varāhamihira, while discussing the installation of idols and the priests qualified to perform this rite, mentions them as the special priests of the deity Brahman, who is associated in Hindu mythology with the Vedas and the excellence of speech.²

¹ Learning was believed to entitle a man to be qualified as a kavi or vipra, TS - II.5.9.1; ŚB, 1.4.2.7; III.5.3.12; Br.Up, VI.4.29; Ved.Ind, II, p.87.

² Brhatsamhitā - 60.19.

CHAPTER V

RSI

The word rsi has been in use since the time of the Rgveda, but the concept denoted by the term has gradually been modified from the original sense of a gifted composer to signify a celestial being, who embodies the ideals of the Vedic religion and culture. The semantic development of the word is easy to trace. The concept is in its formative stage in the Rgveda, is modified in the later Samhitās, and the Brāhmanas mark the close of the first phase of its development.

The rsis of the earlier hymns are inspired poets and singers, who propitiate the gods with hymns and sacrifices¹ and are not indifferent to social success or material gain.² That their prayers are also inspired by material considerations is clear from their longing for securing nourishment,³ thousands of cows,⁴ horses⁵ and honour.⁶ In the later hymns of the Rgveda, the ancient rsis are

¹ RV-I. I. 2; VI. 34. I; VII. 70. 5; VIII. 8. 8;

² Muir - OST., III. p.252; C. Kunhan Raja - 'Vedic Culture' in Cult. Heritage of Ind., Calcutta, 1958, I. p.213.

³ RV-VIII. 8. 15.

⁴ RV-I. 10. 11; I. 179. 6; I. 189. 8; VIII. 3. 4; VIII. 4. 20; X. 33. 4, etc. All subsequent unspecified references are from RV.

⁵ V. 33. 10;

⁶ V. 66. 5; śraue, Geldner - ^{Der RV,} die Rsis' Ruhm suchen.

elevated to an exalted semi-divine status,¹ which is confirmed in the later Samhitās. The comparatively recent rsis continue to be real and living personalities for the society described in the Brāhmanas. The change of outlook in the Upanisads attributes new significance to the rsis. They retire to the forests, but continue to embody the ideals of the contemporary society. The class of rsis though becoming a closed order² is still open to occasional admissions, which are discontinued in the Sūtra period.³

Towards the end of the Vedic period the word rsi begins to denote an idealized class of sages to whom the Vedas were believed to have been revealed, and who were taken to be the exponents of dharma.⁴ In the Epics, the Smrtis and the Purānas,⁵ the rsis are taken to be the representatives of a sacred and remote past and merely serve as mouthpieces for religious discourses. Like the Vedas, they are entitled to a formal respect, and like their stellar counterparts, ^{they} become the silent spectators of the religious world from their lofty position as celestial beings.

¹ I. 164. 15; X. 62. 4; X. 82. 2;

² cf. Nir - XIII. 12.

³ Āp. DS. X. 5. 4 --- avaresu rsayo na jāyante.

⁴ Nir - I. 20; Manu - XII. 106; Müller - HASL, p.42, n.2.

⁵ Rām - I. 4. 12. 13. etc.; Manu - II. 176;

The development of the concept expressed by the word rsi reflects the change in religious and social values, ~~was~~ that contributed to the modification of the established order. Rsi is not the only word to be affected in this manner. Some of the other words used in the Rgveda for the composers of the hymns and the officiants at the sacrifices, later acquire more general or more specific meanings.¹ The modified concept of the word rsi implies idealized holy seers, who were believed to have nourished the Vedic culture.² This idea of idealized personalities appears to have contributed to the formation of the representative group of seven rsis, who are later considered to be the progenitors of the Brāhman gotras.³

The word rsi is not as frequently used in the Rgveda, as some of the other terms denoting a composer. More than half of the total references to rsi occur in the later books, in which the rsis begin to assume a character closer to that of their later image. The term rsi is applied in the Rgveda to some of the poets, who invoked the gods by their hymns.⁴ This apparently leads the

¹ ex. Kavi, dhīra, vipaścit, vipra, brahman etc.

² X. 14. 15; nama rsibhyah pūrvajebhyah pūrvebhyah pathikrdbhyah;
X. 130. 7;

³ Śaṅk 65- pravara, 1

⁴ I. 48. 15; IV. 20. 5; V. 75. I; VI. 44. 13; VIII. 8. 6;
X. 80. 5;

authors of the Vedic Index to describe the composers in general, when discussing the word rsi.¹ The purohita is also included in this description, as he is said to be a singer whether acting as a hotr or brahman priest.² The rsis, probably taken as the purohitas, are supposed to have been attached to the houses of the Vedic kings or nobles.³ The evidence from the Rgveda, however, does not support this assumption. The selective use of the word rsi in the Rgveda eliminates the possibility that it means composers in general.⁴ The surmise is supported by its use with vāghat, a singer.⁵ In order to justify his claim to the patronage of a prince, one of the poets describes himself as the rsi among the singers.⁶ This shows that the rsi was regarded as superior to the general composer or singer of hymns.

The confusion of rsi with the general singer may be due to

¹ Ved. Ind., I. pp.115-8.

² Geldner - Ved. St., II, p.153; Oldenberg - Rel. des veda, p.380.

³ Ved. Ind. p.116; Geldner - ved. Stud., II; p.154.

⁴ cf. Gonda, J. - Epithets in the Rgveda, pp.155-6.

⁵ vāghat is taken to denote officiating priest and singer. It is included in the list of words for both, Nigh. III. 15 & 18; cf. Grassmann-WR, Beter, Opferer; RV- I.3.5; I. 88. 6, vāghato na vāni.

⁶ X. 33. 4.

its derivative meaning. The word is derived from ^{the} verb rs to go¹ or flow,² and is taken to denote the person from whom the songs flow.³ Rsi is used with discrimination in the Rgveda, but gradually it begins to be applied to the composers of the Vedic hymns⁴ in general. According to Yāska, the followers of Upamanyu interpret rsi as 'seer of hymns'.⁵ This suggestion seems to have given rise to the generally accepted idea that the word rsi means a seer, and that it should be derived 'perhaps from an obsolete verb rish for driś to see?'.⁶ The Amarakosa reflects the contemporary usage and the concept expressed by the word rsi, when it gives satyavacas (man of infallible speech), as a synonym of rsi.⁷

¹ I.164.15; rsayah is interpreted as gantārah by Sāyana, who takes the verb in this sense in IX.86.1; IX.97.15, etc.

² IX.54.1; used with sustuti - IV.58.10; IX.62.3; IX.66.22;

³ Development of the meaning is traced from the original ~~verb~~ sense 'breaking forth of songs' to 'the emanating of rays' to explain how the term saptarsi came to denote the constellation of the Great Bear, Grassmann - W.R.

⁴ cf. They use the word ārṣa in the Annkramanīś to indicate the seer of the hymn.

⁵ Nir - II. 11; III. 11.

⁶ Monier-Williams - Skt.-Eng. Dictionary. Chapekar takes the word to be pre-Vedic and a corruption of rksa on the basis of the earlier word saptarksa for the constellation of seven Bears; Chapekar, N.G. - 'Rsi' in Poona Orientalist, 26, nos.3-4, July & October, 1961, p.130.

⁷ Amarakosa - II.7.43; Use of the word ārṣa also indicates the significance that rsi had acquired. Cf. Nir. XIII.12, yadeva kimcānūcānoḥ bhyūhatyārsam tad bhavati; knowledge based on intuition was called ārṣa, Muir - OST, III, p.127.

Another word derived from the same verb is rsu,¹ which occurs four times in the Rgveda in connection with Agni and in genitive plural.² The meaning of the word appears to be at a fluid stage with a bias towards the derivative sense. Geldner translates it as Morgenstrahlen,³ and Sāyaṇa interprets it as 'rays of the Sun' in one verse⁴ and as āgantr in another.⁵ In the two comparatively early verses, he takes it as a synonym of rsi, which seems to suit the context.⁶ It appears that the meanings of the words rsi and rsu were not very distinct. This would also explain the disappearance of the latter.

When used as an adjective in the Rgveda, rsva, another cognate of the word rsi,⁷ implies sublimity or illustriousness. The sense of elevation or prominence which appears to be more pronounced in the meaning of the word rsva, may also be taken as inherent in the

¹ rsu is derived 'von ars in der unter rsi nachgewiesenen Bedeutung', Grassmann - WR; from the verb 2. rish?, Monier-Williams - Skt. Eng. Dict.

² I.127.10; V.25.1; VIII.60/71.15; X.6.1.

³ Geldner - Der RV, translation of the verses referred to in n.2 above.

⁴ X.6.1.

⁵ I.127.10.

⁶ V.25.1; VIII.60/71.15.

⁷ 'Von ars', Grassmann - WR; Verb 2. rish?, Monier-Williams - Skt.-Eng. Dictionary.

term rsi. This may have contributed to the idea of an exalted personality implicit in the concept conveyed by the word rsi.

The rsis are generally associated with the gods Agni,¹ Indra² and Soma,³ and occasionally with the Aśvins⁴ and the Maruts.⁵ The gods Indra and Varuṇa are said to have bestowed speech, reflective thought and learning on the rsis in the beginning of creation.⁶ This seems to contribute to the later belief that the utterances of the rsis were divine. The reference to the discovery of vāc, that had entered the rsis appears to strengthen their claim to inspired speech.⁷ Another passage, which describes the pāvamānī verses as the rasa collected by the rais,⁸ is the first reference in the Rgveda where a particular type of composition is ascribed to them.

As there were earlier⁹ and later rsis,¹⁰ so their prayers are

¹ I.31.1; III.21.3; VI.14.2; VI.16.14; VIII.23.16; IX.66.20; X.80.4;

² I.23.24; IV.20.5; V.29.1; VI.34.1; VII.28.2; VIII.59/70.14; X.22.1;

³ IX.35.4; IX.68.7; IX.86.4; IX.114.2. etc.

⁴ V.75.1; V.78.6; VII.70.5; VIII.8.8. etc.

⁵ V.52.13.14; V.54.7.14; V.59.8;

⁶ VIII.59/Vā1. II.6; Indrāvaruṇā yad-rsibhyo manīsām vāco matim śrutam-adattam-agre.

⁷ X.71.3;

⁸ IX.67.31.32. Merit ascribed to the reading of the verses fore-shadows the Brahmana eulogy of the study of the Vedas.

⁹ I.48.14; IV.50.1; VII.22.9; VII.29.4; VIII.8.6; X.14.15; X.54.3; X.82.4; X.98.9.

¹⁰ I.1.2; IV.20.5;

also classified as such.¹ The references to earlier rsis increase in the later books, which shows the growing regard for antiquity. In addition to the ancient sages who are described as divine² or of divine origin,³ some of the contemporary seers also trace their origin from the gods.⁴ The godlike seven sages are said to have taken up the reins of sacrifice like a charioteer, after reviewing the path of their forefathers.⁵ The later Rgvedic period also marks their association with tapas. The rsis are qualified as tapasvatah (practicing penance),⁶ and the seven sages are referred to as sitting down for penance.⁷

It is generally recognized that gaining the title of rsi depended on the grace of the gods. Varuna is said to have made Vasiṣṭha a rsi.⁸ Agni⁹ and Soma¹⁰ are qualified as makers of rsis. Friendship with rsis is supposed to be a qualification for securing the favour of the gods. A seer requests Indra to help Śarabha, probably a patron who is described as the bandhu of the

¹ VI.34.1; VI.44.13;

² X.130.7. daivyāh.

³ I.164.15; X.62.4;

⁴ X.62.5, the origin of Āngirasa Virūpas is traced from Agni. Viśvāmitra is described as devaja, III.53.9.

⁵ X.130.7.

⁶ X.154.5.

⁷ X.109.4; ŚB - VI.1.1.1. explains the word rsi as śramaṇa tapasā-riṣan; cf. TĀ - II.9.

⁸ VII. 88.4.

⁹ I.31.16.

¹⁰ IX.96.18.

rsis, to enjoy the wealth of his enemy.¹

It appears that the rsis had to face some opposition. Kutsa rsi, when in trouble, calls upon Indra for help.² A poet expecting help reminds the Ásvins how they had responded to the prayers of the ancient sages.³ The rsis appeal to the Maruts to convey them and their patrons in safety under their protection.⁴ This seems to be more urgent than the usual request for protection normally addressed to the gods, as the Maruts are also asked to direct their wrath towards the man, who is hostile to the rsis.⁵ It is not quite clear whether dāsa or dasyu the words qualifying the opponents of the sages have an ethnic implication or denote the enemy in general. The Ásvins are said to have repelled the māyā of a hostile dasyu to protect Atri,⁶ but they had to resort to māyā in order to rescue the sage Saptavadhri.⁷ Indra rescues another rsi by killing Namuci and rendering his māyā harmless.⁸

The rsis seem to be distinguished in the Rgveda from the

¹ VIII.89/100.6.

³ VIII. 8.6.

⁵ I.39.10.

⁷ V.78.6.

⁸ X.73.7; cf. VIII. 51/Vā1. 3.2.

² I.106.6.

⁴ V.65.6.

⁶ I.117.3.

common men in two instances. The horses of Indra, are ~~was~~ said to carry him to the prayers of the rsis and the sacrifices of the mānusa (men).¹ Another verse distinguishes the rsis, who invoke Agni by hymns, from narah, the common men, who call out to Agni when in trouble on the battlefield.² The distinguishing feature of the rsis, in both these verses, seems to be their hymns.³

The use of the word rsi with manusya also deserves notice. The phrase rsayo manusyāh occurs three times⁴ without any conjunction or separating particle. Geldner translates it as 'menschlichen Rsis'⁵ which implies that these human rsis are distinct from the godlike ones. It is difficult to accept this meaning as in one of these passages the rsis are called 'our fathers', which raises them to a higher status than that of the ordinary men.⁶ It may therefore be taken as comparable to the phrase vīprā narah and similar others that occur in the Rgveda, and may be interpreted as the men who possessed the qualities of a rsi.

¹ I.84.2;

² X.80.5;

³ uktha and stuti.

⁴ X.130.5,6; X.150.4.

⁵ Geldner - Der RV, trans. of the above verses.

⁶ X.130.6.

Differences in the functions of a rsi and a king are also brought out in the Rgveda. The king and the sage seem to share equal importance in the verse which describes Viśvāmitra as praying to be appointed a protector of men, or a king, or a rsi who drinks Soma.¹ In another verse apparently composed before the rsis were raised to almost divine eminence, a rsi and a king, apparently regarded as equally worthy of receiving the favour of the Maruts,^{are said to} enjoy similar freedom from common misfortunes and troubles.²

The word sūri, when it once occurs with rsi, is qualified by grnat an adjective usually applied to the officiants at sacrifices and singers of hymns.³ Sūri is distinguished in this verse from rsi by the conjunction ca and thus signifies the sacrificer, who paid for the services of the priests and the poets.⁴

The words rsi and vipra occur together sixteen times in the Rgveda. In five verses vipra is either a part of a compound⁵ or is used in a different case than that of the word rsi.⁶ In the remaining passages both the words refer to the same person. According to Geldner vipra qualifies rsi and the phrase means

¹ III.43.5.

² V.54.7.

³ X.115.9.

⁴ See above, p.161

⁵ V.54.14; VIII.3.4.

⁶ III.21.3; IX.96.6; X.26.5;

redekundiger, redegewaltiger or beredter Rsi's.¹ Sāyana gives the usual meanings he assigns to the two words, that is 'the wise man' for vipra, and 'one who has the power to visualize things beyond ordinary human ken' for rsi. In most of the verses, rsi is qualified by the word vipra,² but in one instance the rsis seem to be distinguished from the vipras though they seem to belong to the same class.³ In another verse, the word rsi signifies a superior person of the same class as the vipra.⁴

The use of both these words as an adjective is not rare in the Rgveda. Their derivation suggests that both the terms originally implied skill in metrical composition, which is generally regarded as a gift from the gods. The widening distinction in their connotations, is due to the different shades of meanings acquired during the Rgvedic age. Vipra begins to imply intellectual animation and insight, and the idea conveyed by the word rsi inclines more towards sanctity, which is associated with antiquity and the power to visualize the unseen as a result of divine favour. This latter aspect is emphasized in the legends of Vatsa and Kavasa. Medhātithi acknowledges Vatsa, when he is convinced that Agni has

¹ Geldner - Der RV, translation of verses in n.5-6 above, p.180

² 1.162.7; III.53.10; IV.50.1; IV.26.1; VIII.68/79.
1; IX.87.3; IX.92.2; IX.108.11.

³ VII.22.9.

⁴ IX.96.6.

favoured him.¹ Kavasa is also admitted to their ranks by the seers when they find that he is favoured by Sarasvatī.² The power to perceive the imperceptible, which is attributed to the rsis, secures them a place by the side of the gods in finding cures for ritual ills or in discovering new details or rites for the sacrifices.³

Many individual seers and groups are designated as rsis. The Navagvas⁴ and the Virūpas⁵ of the Angiras clan, the Kuśikas,⁶ the Priyamedhas⁷ and the sons of Vrstihavya,⁸ are expressly qualified as rsis. Among the individuals who receive this epithet are Atri,⁹ Kaśyapa,¹⁰ Vasistha,¹¹ and Viśvāmitra,¹² who later figure in the group of the seven sages¹³ and are also among the gotrakāras.¹⁴ Agastya is the rsi who is said to have looked after both the varnas.¹⁵

¹ PB - XIV.6.6; abrāhmanosi sūdrāputrā, iti; Vatsa qualified as rsi,
RV VIII.8.15.

² AB - II.19; cf. KB - XII.1.3.

³ AB - I.27; ŚB, I.6.2.7; Ved.Ind., I.117.

⁴ X.108.8. ⁵ X.62.5.

⁶ III.53.10. ⁷ X.73.11.

⁸ X.115.9. ⁹ I.117.3.

¹⁰ IX.114.2. ¹¹ VII.33.13; VII.88.4.

¹² III.53.9.

¹³ Br. Up. - II.2.3-4.

¹⁴ Bau.ŚS - pravarā, 1

¹⁵ I.179.6;

Though there is no conclusive evidence that the son of a rsi could automatically acquire the title of rsi, the possibility that heredity was an important factor cannot be ruled out. The rsis Vyaśva¹ and Vaiyāśva² mentioned in the same hymn may have been father and son or may not have belonged to successive generations. Similarly Atri and Śyāvāśva Ātreya both are qualified as rsis, but if the account in the Brhad-devatā is taken to refer to them, it would appear that the claim of Śyāvāśva to the title of rsi was not based on heredity.³

Though the insistence on ārseya or hereditary priests increases in the ritual circle, it is obvious from the story of Vatsa and Kavasa Ailūsa that the status of a rsi could be attained by persons of doubtful parentage.⁴ The importance of this aspect of the rsi is implicit in the later literature which recognize the dubious origins of most of the notable rsis.⁵ The story of Śyāvāśva related in the Brhad-devatā demonstrates that birth alone did not entitle an individual to become a rsi and that the composition of hymns

¹ VIII.23.16; cf. VIII.9.10.

² VIII.23.24.

³ I.117.3; V.52.13; see below, p. 184

⁴ See above pp. 181-182

⁵ cf. Mbh - Śānti, 296, 12-18; Bhandarkar, D.R. - Some aspects of Ancient Indian Culture, p.58.

continued to be recognized as the real criterion for admission to the exalted rank of rsis. It seems that Śyāvāśva wanted to marry the daughter of the king for whom he had once acted as a priest at a sacrifice. The king when approached consulted his wife, who expressed the wish that her daughter should marry no less a personage than a rsi, as she herself belonged to the family of a rājarsi. Śyāvāśva apparently could not claim to be one as he had no hymns to his credit. In order to fulfil the condition laid down by the queen, he composes a hymn, presumably through divine inspiration, and secures the title of rsi as well as the princess.¹

The word ārseya meaning the descendant of a rsi, is important in this connection. It occurs once in the later strata of the Rgveda, but the meaning which the word denotes in the later Samhitās,² does not appear to be appropriate in the earlier text. Arseya lays stress on heredity, indicates pride of ancestry and continuity of tradition.³ It is commonly used in the Brāhmanas and the Sūtras with reference to the pravaras. Recital of the pravara, that is the names of the rsis believed to have been the founders of the families to which the sacrificers belonged, formed an integral part

¹ Br. Dev. V.50-79, especially verses 65, 67-72.

² TS - I.4.43; VI.6.1.4; VS VII.46; cf. ŚB IV.3.4.19; Weber - Ind. St. - X, p.70.

³ cf. AV. XI.1.26; ŚB XII.4.4.6.

of practically all Śrauta sacrifices.¹ The recital is first alluded to in the Taittirīya Samhitā² and is carried out first by the hotr priest, and then by the adhvaryu with slight modifications.³

Haug understood 'ancestral fire' by the word ārseya⁴ in the clause ārseyam vṛṇīte,⁵ a concise formula used in the Bṛāhmanas and the Sūtras for the recital of the pravaras.⁶ Weber does not agree with this interpretation. He takes it as collective neuter singular and translates it as 'Ahnenreihe'.⁷

¹ Pravaras are mentioned in connection with the New and Full Moon sacrifices, which underlie all istis, SBE, 30, pp. 345 ff; Brough - EBSG, p. 8.

² TS - II.5.9; ŚB - I.4.2; KB - III.2; TB - III.5.3; Ās.Śs - I.2.27 ff; Śān.Śs - I.4.14 ff.

³ Brough - EBSG, p. 9

⁴ AB - VII.25; VIII.3; Haug, M. - AB; II, p. 479

⁵ It first occurs in TS II.5.8.7, but does not appear to have become a stereotyped formula, Brough - EBSG, p. 14.

⁶ Brough - EBSG, pp. 10-16.

⁷ Weber - Ind.St., IX, pp. 321 ff; X, p. 69; Eggeling translates ārseya in SB - I.4.2.9 as 'Agni as' the ancestral hotr priest, SBE, XII, p. 115; Keith translates ārseya in TS - II.5.8.7, as 'one of a rsi's family', The Veda of the Black Yajus School, I, p. 198.

Karandikar discusses the word ārseya in order to prove that the Vedic individual was originally free to choose the names of the rsis he preferred for the pravara ceremony and also to belong to any gotra he liked.¹ According to him the clause ārseyaṃ vrnīte implies the freedom of an individual to choose an ārseya.² He traces the word to the Rgveda in order to determine its meaning. He takes the word to mean "a rsi's glory" and translates abhyārseyām jamadagnivān-nah as 'the ārseya like that of Jamadagni'.³ It is difficult to ascertain the meaning of ārseya from this isolated instance. The word later begins to denote the 'descendant of a rsi', but it is very doubtful if that meaning could be ascribed to it in the Rgveda. Sāyana explains it as the wealth or mantra suitable for the sons of the rsis. 'The sons of the rsis' given by Sāyana besides being the later meaning, is also unnecessary here. The same applies to 'Namen eines Rsi', the interpretation of Geldner. Brough refutes the conclusion of Karandikar and takes the word to mean 'connected with a rsi'.⁴

The names of rsis, which later appear in the pravara lists as

¹ Karandikar thinks that originally the gotras were the ritual colleges, that are later transformed into exogamous clans by the Brāhman after they came in contact with the indigenous exogamous groups, Hindu exogamy, pp.52 ff.

² Karandikar - ibid. pp.58-9.

³ RV - IX.97.51; Karandikar - ibid., pp.54-7.

⁴ Brough, EBSG, p.13.

those of the ancestors of different families, are generally grouped together in the Rgveda¹ with one exception. The names Aurva, Bhrgu and Apnavāna mentioned together in the Rgveda, also occur in the pravara lists of the Jamadagni family.² According to Brough, the hymn in which these names occur appears to be a prototype of the kindling ceremony described in the Brāhmanas and the Sūtras.³

Though the pravara type use of the names of rsis can thus be traced to the Rgveda⁴ it is very doubtful if the word Ārseya, which later becomes almost synonymous with pravara and its implication of ancient heritage, had acquired this meaning at this stage.

As suggested by Brough it is quite possible that insistence on an ārseya priest was meant to ensure the priest's connection with one of the authentic Brāhman clans. But in view of the fact that the Vedic society and the ritual were undergoing modifications and also that the rsis were not necessarily confined to the authentic clans, it is quite probable that the Vedic orthodoxy stressed the importance of ārseya to ensure that the person selected was properly

¹ I.31.17; I.45.3; VII.96.3; VIII.40.12; VIII.43.13;
AV. II.32.3.

² VIII.91/102.4.

³ Brough, EBSG, pp.21-22.

⁴ Brough - EBSG, pp.19-20; See n.1 and 2 above; of the pravara type use of Atrivad by the Atris in the fifth book of RV; of similar use of rsi names in magical context in AV II.32.3; VI.137.1. etc.

trained and had imbibed the sacrificial tradition.

The importance of three successive generations of rsis began to be stressed, when the injunction for priests who could claim a rsi ancestor was considered insufficient.¹ The importance of citing rsi ancestors appears to have increased with the growing rigidity of the social divisions and the rarity of new rsis. The recital of pravaras thus appears to have become part of the Śrauta ritual to prove the continuity of the ritual in its ancient form.

Earlier hymns of the Rgveda show that a rsi was considered an inspired singer or composer on a higher plane than a vipra. It appears that birth or composition of hymns² could not enable a person to become a rsi, and that it was considered necessary to gain the favour of the gods³ or to secure the gifts of speech and knowledge from them.⁴

The rsis are associated with tapas,⁵ but are not identified with the ascetic tradition like the munis or the yatis. The rsis who renounced the world or claimed noble heredity could not have been rare, but these factors were not regarded as their special

¹ Rsa ārseya rsinām napāt. MS. IV.13.9; VS XXI.61; XXVIII.23,46; TB II.6.15; III.6.15.

² cf. IV.36.6, ṛṣir-vacasyayā.

³ See above, p. 177

⁴ See above, p. 176

⁵ X.109.4; X.154.5.

characteristics.¹ The Rgvedic r̥sis are also associated with priestly activities,² but the later literature recalls them more for their vision and sagacity than their priestly aspect. The word r̥si in the Rgveda is used more as an epithet than as a synonym of rtvij. This supports the suggestion that the eminence of a r̥si was not so much based on priestly activity as on the qualities, which made them important for the Vedic culture. They are referred to in the Smrtis as prajāpatis and not as priests - an indication that they were not associated with priestly function.³ Their importance for ritual later becomes symbolical, as they are believed to have conducted ideal and flawless sacrifices in the remote past.⁴

It ~~was~~ thus becomes evident that the word r̥si expressed the idea of a sage rather than that of a functionary. Thus it appears that r̥si could denote, from the beginning, an ideal person. The first indication, that the concept is being idealized, occurs in the Purusa Sūkta,⁵ where the r̥sis are mentioned with the gods and the sādhyas as the first sacrificers, who are said to have helped

¹ cf. Tā - II.9.

² IX.62.17; IX.86.4, etc.

³ Manu - I.34; cf. Mat.P. - 144.35.

⁴ ŚB - IV.6.9.23; cf. I.6.2.7.

⁵ X.90.7.

the creation of the world from the limbs of the primeval man.

The tendency to create an ideal or archetype is quite common. Such ideal personalities help to sustain society in its moments of crisis by acting as reminders of those rare occasions, when the sectional and supreme interests of the groups are integrated.¹ The individuals who rise above personal and sectional interests and succeed in showing that the supreme or the unattainable aim can be achieved, are treated as ideals by later generations. The description of the rsis in the later literature shows that they are remembered as such. The value of social actions is also judged by succeeding generations in relation to these idealized figures, who thus link the past with the present and the future. The type of man, that a society holds as an ideal, also provides the key to the social system, for the concept of an ideal reflects the actual state of society and its aspirations.

The concept of the ideal conveyed by the word rsi, embodying deep seated aspirations of the Vedic Aryans, thus appears to have performed a normative function. The description, in the Rgveda, of the group of seven sages known as the saptarsis supports the

¹ J.G.Peristiany - Introduction to Sociology and Philosophy by E.Durkheim, tr. by D.F.Pocock, London, 1953, pp.XXV,XXVI.

suggestion that they symbolized ideal personages.¹ Though the names of the seven sages are not mentioned in the Rgveda, the list that appears in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa includes the names of some of the eminent rsis connected with the Vedic ritual and culture. The growing importance of the concept conveyed by the word rsi is also indicated by the fact that the later group of the seven rsis completely replaced the earlier one of the seven vipras.²

¹ IV.42.8 etc.

² see above, pp.165 ff.

CHAPTER VI

Puróhita

The office of the purohita is generally considered of great importance in encouraging the emergence and increasing the influence of the Brāhman class, which came to be identified with priesthood.¹ The claims of the Brāhman for privileges in all matters as well as their exemption from owing obedience to Kings² is taken as an expression of their superiority over the Ksatriyas.³ In the struggle for supremacy between these two orders of vedic aristocracy, the king and the purohita are taken to be the representatives of their respective classes.⁴

Purohita is regarded as the most ancient name for a professional priest.⁵ It is generally accepted that the Brāhman established their hold on society through the office of the purohita⁶ while the Ksatriyas were engaged in consolidating their territorial power. Thus the Ksatriyas on achieving political stability found themselves subservient to the Brāhman.⁷ The existence of two

¹ The purohitas and the Brāhman are generally treated as identical. cf. Beni Prasad - The State in Ancient India, pp.29,53-4.

² ŚB-V. 4.2.3. Somo^ssmākaṃ rājā; Gau.DS.-XI.1, rājā vai sarvasyeṣṭe brāhmaṇavarjam.

³ AB - VIII.1,9; PB-XI.11.1; ŚB-V.3.4.20; cf. Br.Up.-I.4.12.

⁴ cf. Altekar - State & Govt. in Act.India, pp.32-5.

⁵ Müller - HASL, pp.485-6. 488.

⁶ Kaegi, A. - The Rigveda, p.17.

⁷ Weber - HIL, pp.18-19

important and eminent classes and their rivalry for social and political supremacy is implicit in this view, which also ascribes a vital role to the function and position of the purohita as the adviser of kings in consolidating the power of priesthood.

This supposition received support from the Smrtis which assign a more extensive authority and exaggerated veneration to the Brāhmans than those claimed by the priesthood of any other country.

The Brāhmans followed up the success in establishing their social and religious supremacy by its continued maintenance. This was not very difficult as their claims to respect, privileges and exemptions were not confined to religious affairs but extended to political and other secular matters. Roth first explained the purohita in this context as the chief factor in consolidating the power of the priesthood.¹ His suggestion has been accepted by successive scholars.² Thus the purohita is described as the spiritual and religious teacher of the king, whom he accompanied on his military expeditions and for whom he offered sacrifices. In short, the purohita is said to have combined the functions of chief-priest, poet-laureate, and the counsellor in general.³ This;

¹ Roth - Zur Litteratur und Geschichte des Weda, pp.117 ff.

² Haug - The Aitareya Brāhman, pp.66-7; Ved.Ind, II, pp.249,255.

³ Geldner - Ved.St, II, pp.153-4; Macdonell - HSL, p.159.

however, is a later picture, as the evidence cited dates from the Atharva-veda onwards.

The emphasis on the whole is on the purohita being mainly instrumental in gaining the uncommon esteem and influence for the Brāhman class.¹ Oldenberg, while accepting the general character of the purohita, suggested that far from being the creator of the power of priesthood, he owed his influence to the necessity of having a priest for conducting the ritual.²

An analysis of the word purohita and the idea it conveyed in the Rgveda and the later Samhitās should prove helpful in solving the problem whether the purohita contributed to the importance of the priesthood or owed his eminence to the influence of the Brāhman class.

In the later Vedic literature the word purohita denotes a priest, especially the king's chaplain. It was customary for kings, chiefs and nobles to appoint a purohita to guide them in religious matters, to conduct the minor ritual on their behalf and to officiate for them in the major sacrifices.³ The original non-political nature of

¹ The order of hymns in the RV. gives precedence to those of Agni the purohita over those to Indra the warrior, Eggeling - The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, pt.I, p.XIX.

² Oldenberg - Die Religion des veda, pp.382-3.

³ AB - VIII. 24.

the office may have led the rulers to confide in the purohitas and to rely on their advice which was ostensibly unprejudiced.

The purohita on the other hand was financially more secure than the general class of officiants, but his office was not entirely free from hazards as the relevant stories in the Brāhmanas imply.¹ Another disadvantage from the purohita's point of view would be the uncertainty of the tenure of the office, as the rulers could be whimsical in conferring their favours. These drawbacks in an otherwise attractive office² were sought to be removed by limiting the authority of the employer through fear of retribution and promises of suitable wordly and heavenly rewards.³

The purohitas, who exerted great influence over their employers as chief advisers and supervisors of their magico-religious rites, fully exploited their influential position and evolved measures for safeguarding the office and securing its permanence. This was partly achieved by making the office hereditary⁴ and partly by managing that the kings could neither appoint more than one purohita,⁵ nor dismiss the office holder.⁶

¹ See below, pp. 142-4.

² The office was called paramatā, ŚB - II. 4.4.5.

³ AV - III.19.1; VS - IX.23; XI.81; AB - III.17; VIII.1,4.

⁴ cf. RV - X.33; AB - VIII.27; Oldenberg - Rel. des Veda, p.375. Geldner - Ved. St., II, pp.150, 180.

⁵ Geldner suggested that more than one purohita could be employed at the same time, Ved. St., II, p.144; for refutation of this view, cf. Ved. Ind., II, p.5, n.4; The purohitas seem to have reserved the right to serve more than one king, ŚB, - II.4.4.5, Devabhāga Śrautārṣa as the purohita of the Kurus and the Śrājāyas. Jala Jātukarṇya is mentioned as the purohita of Kaśī, Videha and Kośala, Śan. ŚS - XVI.29

⁶ Dismissal of purohita as a political expedient, Kauṭilya - Arthaśāstra, I, 9-10.

Though the purohitas thus succeeded in consolidating their office and appear to have extended their influence to secular matters, their contribution to the growing importance of the Brāhmans as a sacerdotal class is rather doubtful. In spite of their boastful assertions¹ the purohitas as employees could not really ignore the inclinations of their masters.² Whatever influence the purohita apparently gained in political and social matters he seems to have lost in ritual circles, if he had any such influence. He does not appear to have exercised any appreciable influence in the sacrificial ceremonial by virtue of his office. His participation in the sacrifices was for the benefit of the king, and he had to be initiated as one of the four main priests. That the purohita was not important for the ritual ceremonial is also indicated by the rare occurrence of the word in the ninth book of the Rgveda, a collection of hymns for the Soma sacrifice which occupied the central place in the Rgvedic ritual.

A purohita's close association with the king³ in the Vedic period may be inferred from his inclusion among the eight ratnins

¹ AV - III.19.4; VS - XI.82; AB - VIII.24-5.

² cf. The dismissal of the purohitas and their efforts to be reinstated, AB - VIII.27,35; Sāyana on RV - X.57.1.

³ cf. Kāt.ŚS - XXII.11.17; Keith - CHI, I, p.95; Beni Prasad - The State in Ancient India, p.29.

or rājakrts.¹ The same trend of associating the chaplain and the king is followed by Manu who assigns the kings, their purohitas and the Ksatriyas, all grouped together, a lower place in comparison to the ascetics, the vipras and the rsis while discussing the metempsychosis of different categories of men.² The idea that the purohita is not directly connected with ritual, but is strictly a priest in the service of the king, is also endorsed in the Amarkośa, where he is mentioned in the list of royal officials and not among the designations of various priests.³

Though conceding the importance and attractions of the office of purohita and even coveting it,⁴ the orthodox circles seem to have held it in lesser esteem in the ritual context. The word generally occurs in the context of kings and the sacrifices especially meant for them. In the epics and the classical literature the purohita of the king is depicted as rather a formal figure in contrast to the rsis, the officiating priests, or the

¹ AV - III.5.7; TS - I.8.9.1; TB - I.7.3.1; called vīras in PB - XIX.1.4.

² Manu - XII.46, 48-9.

³ AK - II.8.1, 5; Halāy - II.426.

⁴ TS - VII.4.1.1.; TB - II.7.1.2; The sacrifice Brhaspatisava is prescribed for obtaining it, Kāt.ŚS - XXII. 5.11:

learned Brāhman teachers.¹

This attitude may be traced to the beginning of the office, which does not seem to be connected with the main stream of the sacrificial ceremonial. In the Rgveda, the references to the sacrifices and the priests suggest a fairly elaborate ritual and an organized priesthood with specialized functions.² The priests are frequently mentioned by their general and technical names, and the word purohita also occurs twenty-four times, but it does not specifically denote a priest except in one verse.³

Sāyana normally explains the word when it occurs in connection with Agni, as 'placed to the east of the altar as āhavanīya' or 'placed in front by the gods⁴ or the sacrificers'.⁵ In the alternative explanation 'doing good or acting like a purohita',⁶ he implies comparison with the priest but not the priest himself.

¹ Mbh., Anu., 93.130; Manu - XII, 46; Bhāg.P. - VI.7.36; IX.18.25; cf. Muir - OST, I.p.128.

² RV - I.94.6; II.1.2; III.4.5, etc. Keith - CHI, pp.108-9; Bloomfield - The Religion of the Veda, p.31.

³ RV - X.150.5; all subsequent unspecified references are from the RV.

⁴ I.55.3; II.24.9.

⁵ V.II.2; VI.70.4.

⁶ - I.1.1; I.128.4; III.11.1; VIII.90.101.12; X.122.4; X.150.4,5. purohitavad hitakārī.

When used for Devāpi, the word seems to be understood by him as the 'purohita priest'.¹ Sāyana suggests brahman priest as an alternative meaning in the verse, where purohita occurs in the context of priestly functions.² This shows that, being aware of the ritualistic traditions, he found it difficult to reconcile purohita in a purely sacrificial setting.

That the word did not signify the purohita priest in the Rgveda is also suggested by Geldner's interpretations. He usually translates the word as Bevollmächtigter, thus implying an authorized deputy or agent.³ As this does not suit all the passages, he takes the word in its literal sense in some verses,⁴ translates it as 'Leiter' in one,⁵ as 'Vortritt' in another,⁶ and only once as 'der Purohita'.⁷

That the word is generally used in a literal sense and only occasionally denotes a priest is also confirmed by the use of its components and of other words similar in form and concept. The

¹ X. 98.7.

² I.94.6.

³ Gonda does not consider it appropriate, Epithets in the RV, p.92, n.95.

⁴ I.55.3; II.24.9; VI.70.11, etc.

⁵ VIII.27.1.

⁶ VIII.90/101.12.

⁷ X.150.5.

components of purohita, the indeclinable puras and the verb dhā when used together, are suggestive of importance¹ and convey the idea of honour or respect. The phrase implies that a person thus referred to is most worthy or most suitable for the appointed task.

The combination of puras with the root dhā occurs in relation to the gods Agni,² Indra,³ Brhaspati,⁴ Earth and Heaven.⁵ It appears that Agni is thus honoured because of his importance for the sacrificial ritual and Indra for his role of Vrtra-slayer and the vanquisher of foes. In one verse Indra and Agni, qualified as arhat (deserving), share the honour of being placed in the forefront.⁶

A comparison of these references with the passages, where the words purogā,⁷ purogava⁸ and pura-etr⁹ are used for the same gods and in similar contexts, helps to form an idea of the inherent

¹ IV.20.3; V.31.11.

² I.139.1; III.2.5; VI.10.1; VIII.44.3; X.140.6.

³ I.131.1; VI.17.8; VIII.12.22,25.

⁴ IV.50.1.

⁵ II.32.1; VII.53.1.

⁶ V.86.5.

⁷ I.124.1; I.188.11; X.110.11; cf. AV - V.12.11.

⁸ X.85.8.

⁹ I.76.2; III.11.5; V.46.1; VI.21.12; VI.47.7; VII.33.6; VII.41.5; IX.87.3; IX.97.29.

meaning of purohita and the modifications in its connotation.

The first two words occur in the later strata of the Rgveda and are exclusively used for Agni. He is described as the leader of the gods in words that almost echo the passage where he is said to be the purohita of the gods.¹ It is thus evident that the concepts conveyed by these words were alike if not the same.²

The word pura-etr³ and the various conjugational forms of the verb dhā in conjunction with puras generally occur in the earlier books while the compounds of puras with hita, gava and gā are mostly found in the later strata.⁴ The words purogava and purogā seem to convey the literal meaning of purohita, when the use of the latter becomes confined to the priest of that name. Other cognates like purodhātr, purodhas and purodhā are not found in the Rgveda, but appear in the later Samhitās and denote the different aspects of the purohita priest - an indication that the office of the purohita had fully developed.

¹ I.188.11, purogā Agnir devānām.
X.110.11, Agnir-devānām-abhavat purogāh.
cf. III.2.8, Agnir-devānām-abhavat purohitah.
X.150.4, Agnir-devo devānām abhavat purohitah.

² cf. VII.33.6, abhavac-ca pura-etā Vasistha ādit Trtsūnām viśo aprathanta.

³ See n. ^{p. 200} 4, above. The word becomes more popular in the AV; VS and the Brāhmaṇas.

⁴ See above, p. 200, n. 7-8; below, p. 202.

The term purohita occurs eight times in the earlier and sixteen times in the later books of the Rgveda, is generally applied to the gods and twice only to human beings - the seers Vasiṣṭha¹ and Devāpi.² The gods thus qualified are Agni, Indra, Brahmanaspati,³ Sūrya, Heaven and Earth,⁴ mostly the deities with reference to whom the phrase purāṣ with ^{the} verb dhā is also used. The glory of the Sun makes him great and his greatness in turn enables him to be qualified as the purohita of the gods.⁵ Indra is said to be the purohita for all undertakings.⁶ This indicates that Indra, considered unique on account of his heroic deeds, had acquired the position of the head of the gods.

The word purohita, when applied to Agni, is generally used as an adjective and not as a noun implying a priest. Though Agni is often qualified as a purohita,⁷ he can not be regarded as such in a specialised sense, for the office of the purohita is almost

¹ X.150.5.

² X.98.7.

³ II.24.9.

⁴ VI.70.4.

⁵ VIII. 90/101. 12. mahnā devānām asuryaḥ purohitaḥ.

⁶ I.55.3; cf. above, p. 200, n. 3, 6.

⁷ I.1.1.; I.44.12; III.11.1; V.11.2.

exclusively associated with Brhaspati in later Vedic literature.

On the other hand the respect and honour offered to Agni by placing him in the forefront¹ (purohita), are also implied in many verses by the combination of purā and dhā.² Agni therefore is not so much the purohita priest as the pre-eminent god among the Vedic deities.³ It is stated that men give first place to Agni in order to gain happiness (sumna).⁴ The passage, which mentions Agni as the purohita in every house, can either be explained by taking the word in its literal sense or by assuming that the householders, at this period, generally employed domestic priests.⁵ The former alternative suits the context better, for the honouring of Agni in the homes of his worshippers is quite natural in view of the epithets atithi and grhapati,⁶ that are especially applied to him. It seems reasonable to accept the original meaning of purohita when

¹ I.58.3.

² I.139.1; VI.10.1; VIII.44.3.

³ III.2.8; X.150.4.

⁴ III.2.5.

⁵ I.128.4, sa sukratuḥ purohito dame dame.

⁶ atithi - I.127.8; II.4.1, etc.; grhapati - I.12.6; VI.15.19.

men are said to have kindled Agni, the first purohita and the banner of sacrifice,¹ or when Agni is described as the purohita in the uktha (sacrifice or hymns).² Though the word was gradually beginning to convey the concept of a priest in the later books of the Rgveda, the primary sense seems to be implied when Agni is said to be the purohita of the goddess Dawn,³ or when Agni the purohita is praised by seven priests.⁴

The meaning of the term purohita, when used for Agni in association with the words manus, mānusa and pāñcajanya appears less definite. Agni is called rsi, mahāgaya, pavamāna, purohita and pāñcajanya in the same verse.⁵ There should be no difficulty in interpreting purohita in its earlier sense if all these adjectives are taken as independent of each other, as they really seem to be. If the words pāñcajanya and purohita being contiguous

¹ V.11.2.

² VIII.27.1.

³ X.92.2.

⁴ X.122.4.

⁵ IX.66.20; cf. Atri described as the pāñcajanya rsi,
I.117.3.

are taken as connected, then Agni, on the analogy of his description as the hotṛ of the people,¹ may be regarded as the purohita of the five tribes.² But the word in this construction also need not denote a priest and may safely be taken to imply that Agni is honoured among the five tribes who are regarded as the original Indo-Aryan community. This inference is confirmed by the reference to Agni as saptamānusah, when the tribes came to be known symbolically as seven.³

The verse which describes Agni as the protector in the villages and the mānusa purohita in the sacrifices, belongs to the later Rgvedic period, when the word had begun to denote a priest.⁴ But the description of Agni in the context, emphasizing his divine character, seems to favour the literal sense of the word purohita; Sāyana is therefore right in explaining mānusa as 'beneficial to human beings, the priests and the sacrificers'.⁵ An earlier passage refers to the same god as the purohita of manus, and here the word

¹ X.92.1.

² cf. X.45.6, janā yadagnim-ayajanta pañca.

³ VIII.39.8; Hopkins-JAOS, ¹⁸⁹³XV, p.260; ibid, ¹⁸⁹⁶XVI, p.278.

⁴ I.44.10.

⁵ Geldner translates it as 'du bist der Anwalt bei den Opfern, von Manu (den Menschen) dazu bestimmt', Der.Rv., I.p.54. cf. VI.50.7, where waters are called mānusiḥ in the same sense.

comes close to denoting a priest.¹ Like Devāpi, who acted as the purohita of Śantanu and accepted the office of the hotr while officiating for him, Agni the purohita is also mentioned in this verse as a hotr. It is not likely however that Agni described as occupying his special place² and urged by the gods, was here thought of specifically as a purohita priest.

The word purohita in the later hymns of the Rgveda appears to be in a transitional stage, drawing nearer to its later meaning. This suggestion is supported by the use of the word in the priestly context. In a hymn of the second book various priestly offices are ascribed to Agni but purohita is not among them.³ In a hymn of the first book the same god is said to perform the offices of hotr, praśāstr and potr, and is also described as a purohita from birth.⁴ This citation is clearly to be interpreted in its literal sense, but it is very significant that the term purohita occurs in the context of priestly functions, an indication that the priestly aspect was beginning to be associated with the word.

¹ III.3.2. hotā niṣatto manuṣaḥ purohitaḥ. kṣayam brhantam pari bhūṣati

² Agni's kṣaya is also mentioned in III.2.6; III.11.7; X.8.2.

³ II.1.2; also repeated as X.91.10.

⁴ I.94.6.

The word purohiti occurs twice in the Rgveda and is interpreted as the office of the purohita.¹ It is occasionally used in the Sūtra and the later literature to denote the functions of a purohita, but in the later Samhitās and the Brāhmanas the word purodhā is generally used to express this idea. In classical writings, purodhā is gradually replaced by the word paurohitya.²

It is thus clear that the meaning of purohiti is determined on the basis of its later use and the idea of ^apriest associated with the word purohita. The relation of purohiti with the latter, which is generally used in its derivative sense in the earlier books of the Rgveda, suggests that its literal meaning would be more appropriate. Geldner translates purohiti as 'Purohitaamt' in the verses where it occurs in the Rgveda, but Sāyana interprets it in one context as demonstration of respect, which he further explains as adoration through eulogies.³ In the passage brāhmāṇyesām śrnutam hāvīmani satyā Trtsūnām abhavat purohitih,⁴ the word is apparently connected with Trtsūnām. But the ministration that

¹ VII.60.12; VII.83.4.

² 'Würde und Amt des Purohita', Sanskrita Wörterbuch;
AV - V.24.1; TS - II.1.2.9; VII.4.1.1; TB - II.7.1.2;
AB - VII.31; VIII.24-27; PB - XIII.3.12; 9.27;
SB - IV.1.4.5; purodhākāma, PB - XV.4.7;
Kāt.ŚS - XXII.5.11.

³ VII.60.12. puraskriyā, pūjā, stutilakṣaṇā.

⁴ VII.83.4; cf. v.8.

proved successful is supposed to have been carried out on behalf of the Ṛtsus by Vasistha -- the seer of the hymn. The commentators and the translators of the Rgveda therefore insert the word Vasistha or mama to avoid the impression that the purohiti was performed by the Ṛtsus. Interpretation of purohiti in its literal sense will remove this difficulty. The priority given by the Ṛtsus to the worship of Indra and Varuṇa would then appear to have proved successful, as the gods are said to have listened to their invocations. This precedence in worship offered to Indra and Varuṇa may be compared to similar honour (purohiti), shown to Mitra and Varuṇa during the course of sacrifices.¹ It is difficult to take purohiti in this instance as referring to the functions or office of the purohita priest, as he is never directly mentioned in a sacrificial context.² It is true that Vasistha the seer of these hymns, is the only sage qualified as purohita in the Rgveda, but it is significant that Vasistha as the purohita is mentioned in the

¹ VII.60.12, repeated as VII.61.12, iyam deva purohitir-yuvabhyām yajñeṣu Mitṛā-Varunāvakāri.

² See above, pp. 196, 199

tenth book¹ and not in the seventh, though the latter contains hymns describing his purohita-like activities for his patrons.² As the concept of priest conveyed by the word purohita does not appear to have fully developed at this stage, it is better to suppose that purohiti implied esteem and not the office of the priest. The use of purohiti, comparable to that of upastuti³ and devahūti⁴ (invocation) in similar contexts, may be taken to suggest that it was part of a literary expression rather than a priestly function. It is evident from the hymns generally quoted as illustrations of the activities of a purohita⁵ that the Rgvedic sages were quite familiar with the mediation of priests in secular matters on behalf of the ruling chiefs. The sage Viśvāmitra claims that he helped the Bharata warriors to cross the swollen rivers safely,⁶ and that his brahman protected the Bharata people (janam).⁷ Vasistha also takes credit for similar help rendered to Sudās and his party.⁸ The description of a seer and his activities in a late

¹ X.150.5.

² VII.18 & 83, cf. VII.33.6.

³ VII.83.7, satyā nr̥ṇām admasadām upstutir---.

⁴ VI.65.5, satyā nr̥ṇām abhavat devahūtiḥ.

⁵ III.33 & 53; VII. 18 & 83.

⁶ III.33; III.53.9 & 10.

⁷ III.53.12.

⁸ VII.18 & 83.

hymn is comparable to that of a purohita and his functions.¹

A rsi laments about his poverty before the son of his deceased patron, and reminds the prince of having been his father's protégé. The last three verses are almost an indirect plea for reinstatement. Though the word purohita does not occur in the hymn, use of the verb vr, generally associated with the selection of a priest or a patron, indicates the special nature of the patronage secured by the seer.² The function of composing and singing the eulogies of kings, though not especially associated with the purohita is also mentioned in this hymn. That the function was quite common at this time, is evident from the verse, in which the delight of Soma, when it is mixed with milk, is compared to the pleasure that the kings derive from their praśastis (songs of praise).³

It is surprising that these functions, later assigned to the purohita priest, are not explicitly associated with the word purohita which is by no means rare in the Rgveda. It is therefore reasonable to infer that the functions of the purohita and the rtviṣ were not yet clearly marked, and could be combined by any eligible priest. The office of the purohita would appear to have

¹ X.33.

² X.33.4, āvr̥ṇi

³ IX.10.3.

become more exclusive when the nature and duration of official functions made it difficult for the office holder to take part in the general priestly activities. Demarcation of functions may have led to the necessity of finding a new name, and the word purohita with its association of precedence and suitability would appear to have proved an appropriate designation for the priestly deputy of the king.

Gonda, while analysing the word purohita, concentrates mostly on its magical aspect of protection.¹ The importance of magic in the functions of purohita is apparently suggested by his survey of the concepts conveyed by the word in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, the Sūtras and the Mahābhārata. This study of the word purohita in the later literature, has convinced Gonda that the purohita priest acted as a shield for the people who followed him, and that originally the purohita was placed in front on account of his powers or the importance of his person for the function of protection.² The importance of the purohita is said to derive from the general belief of Vedic men in the efficacy of magical means for securing protection from all sides especially from the dangers in front. Gonda traces the later notions about the functions of a purohita to that verse in the Rgveda, which describes the blessings a king could hope to enjoy

¹ Gonda, J. - 'Purohita', in Studia Indologica, pp.107-124.

² ibid., p.118.

by giving precedence to the Brahman. In the Rgveda, Gonda not only examines the verses where the term purohita occurs but also those where the words purastāt, purās and similar terms are used, in order to prove that the leader was expected to know his way and could be thus relied upon to avert the dangers. According to Gonda the importance of the purohita and his functions is explained by the derivative meaning of the word and the general belief that putting in front has the magico-religious purpose of enforcing from the gods the desired objects and especially protection from danger.¹

But the excessive importance placed on the functional of protection by Gonda, appears to be unnecessary as the use of the word purohita and its components in the Rgveda shows that placing in front also suggested the ideas of respect and honour on account of the suitability and the greatness of the person accepted as the forerunner.²

The priest who was likely to succeed in getting himself accepted as the purohita of the king could not possibly be lacking in the knowledge and training necessary for acting as a rtvij at the Śrauta sacrifices. The interests of his employer and the

¹ Gonda 'Purohita',
~~ibid.~~, pp. 110-1.

² cf. the words arhat and mahnā used in this connection, see above, pp. 200, 202; ; also see X.17.5.

temptation of extra fees must have proved sufficient inducements for officiating at these. The surmise that the purohita participated in the sacrificial ritual, raises the point about the capacity in which he was likely to do so. As an important royal dignitary and in order to be effective, his choice would be guided by the comparative importance of different priestly offices. Although in theory all priestly functions were considered equal, that of the hotr at first, and of the brahman afterwards appear to have been regarded as having greater importance.

Thus the association of both these offices with the officiating purohita seems to be justified, but the available evidence does not support the assumption as far as the Rgveda is concerned. Geldner suggested that the purohita from the beginning acted as the brahman priest when participating in the sacrificial ritual.¹ He based this view on the references to Vasistha and Brhaspati as purohitas in some passages and as brahman in others, and also on the apparent similarity of the functions of these priests. The brahman priest as the supervisor was expected to counteract the mistakes and slips in the sacrificial performance, while the purohita was held responsible for looking after the

¹Geldner - Ved.Stud, II, p.144; III, p.155.

manifold interests of his patron by removing obstacles and averting calamities. Knowledge of charms was thus essential for both the brahman and the purohita, who thus became closely associated with the Atharva-veda.¹

As the hotr, the adhvaryu^w and the udgātr priests were each assigned a Samhitā to draw upon for their functional requirements, the Atharva-veda was later ascribed to the brahman priest.² Thus the importance of the offices and the similarity of functions strengthened the suggestion that the purohita acted as the brahman priest when officiating at the sacrificial ceremonial. As this supposition failed to reconcile the antiquity of the purohita with the later emergence and importance of the brahman priest, Oldenberg suggested that the purohita, when participating in the ritual, originally acted as the hotr, who is considered to be one of the oldest priestly functionaries.³ Both these assumptions are based on the alleged antiquity of the purohita priest and the use of the words purohita, and brahman or hotr for the same individuals in the Rgveda. But it is clear from the references to purohita in this Samhitā that the functions later ascribed to him were known, though

¹ For brahman, cf. Bloomfield - Hymns of the AV, pp.LX,LXI.
For purohita, cf. the incantations in AB, VIII, 24-8.

² Bloomfield - ibid, pp.LVIII,LXII,LXV.

³ Oldenberg - Rel.des Veda, pp.380-1.

the office as such had not developed. References to Agni as the first purohita fail to establish that this office is ancient. The words prathama and purohita, when used for this god,¹ do not suggest that he is the first priest but that he is first in importance.² The adjective prathama is often applied to hotr³ and seems to have attached itself to purohita⁴ by association.⁵ Besides this, prathama implies foremost in rank and not necessarily in time. This is indicated by its use for the god whom the Vedic seers wish to describe as the most eminent deity.⁶

It is obvious from the passages, where the words purohita and brāhman occur in connection with Brhaspati and Vasistha, that these words do not definitely denote a priest.⁷ Before examining the significance of these words in such contexts, It would be better to see if the word purohita had retained its primary meaning in the latter strata of the Rgveda. That the word also implies 'placed first' or 'eminent' in the tenth book of this Samhitā has already

¹ V.II.2; X.122.4.

² cf. I.31.1-3.

³ II.3.7; III.4.7; III.7.8; X.110.7; cf. I.94.6, hotāsi pūrvyah.

⁴ see n.1 above.

⁵ X.66.13.

⁶ Indra - II.12.1; Ásvins - V.77.1; Dyāvā. - X.12.1.

⁷ See below, pp. 223-6, 227-30.

been pointed out.¹ The continuing use of purohita in its derivative meaning is also confirmed by the reference to two unspecified deities as purohita rtvij.² If the word is interpreted as a specialized priest, it would be difficult to explain the unusual presence of two purohitas in one sacrifice. Moreover a purohita, in a sacrificial context, is generally referred to by the designation he had to adopt when participating in ritual performance.

Similarly the two divine hotrs qualified as purohitas³ could not be the priests of that name, for hotr is never directly referred to as purohita. An explanatory remark is generally added when a purohita is said to undertake the duties of hotr.⁴ The term purohita should be taken to imply eminence when it is used with hotr for the same person and without a distinguishing explanation. The two deities, qualified as purohita and rtvij or hotrs, are probably the same gods who are mentioned in the Aprī hymns as the divine hotrs.⁵ As the word hotr is more regularly associated with

¹ See above, p.204, n.3-4.

² X.70.7, purohitāvrtvijā yajñe asmin. perhaps Agni and Aditya.

³ X.66.13.

⁴ X.98.7, purohito hotrāya vṛtaḥ; cf. I.58.3; III.3.2, hotā niṣattaḥ.

⁵ See above p.215, n.3; cf. X.65.10.

these dual deities, purohita should be taken as an adjective in the above instances.¹ This suggestion is supported by the use of purohita as an adjective for the deities Heaven and Earth, who are said to have been placed in the forefront (purohite).² It is obvious that the word can be interpreted here in its literal sense only as Griffith, who usually translates it as 'high priest', has to explain it in this verse as 'set foremost'.³

It is thus apparent that the word purohita has retained its primary meaning in the latest book of the Rgveda and that it implies, especially in regard to Agni, pre-eminence rather than his priestly aspect. It is therefore doubtful if the identity of the hotr and the purohita priests inferred from the application of these words to Agni can be really proved.

The identity of the two priests is also sought to be confirmed by the verses, which are said to ascribe the characteristic duties of the hotr priest to the purohita Agni.⁴ This suggestion also is not very sound. All priestly offices, probably to give them greater

¹ See above, p.216, n.2-3.

² VI.70.4, hotrvūrye purohite; cf. I.31.3, arejetām rodasī hotrvūrye. cf. VII.53.1, the ancient praising kavis are said to have placed these deities in the forefront, puro dadhire.

³ cf. Geldner - 'haben sie bei der Hotrwahl den Vorrang', Der RV, II, p.174. Griffith also translates purohita as 'set in the van' in I.55.3; and 'set high' in I.58.3.

⁴ VIII.27.1; X.1.6; Ved.Ind., II, p.8, n.37.

sanctity, are related to Agni. But his basic functions of invoking the gods and carrying oblation to them make him identical to hotr.¹ The derivative meaning of the word hotr is twofold 'one who invokes' and 'one who offers oblations'.² Thus the characteristics of hotr are implicit in the role assigned to Agni in the sacrificial ritual, though he may be referred to by any other priestly designation. Acceptance of the priestly connotation of purohita in this verse also can not support the suggested assumption, as the characteristics of hotr or purohita could not be attributed to the king or the ksatriyas on the basis that Agni the purohita is also addressed as rājan.³

The only reference in the Rgveda, which connects a seer, the word purohita and the function of mediation to remedy a misfortune occurs in the tenth book. Devāpi, referred to as the purohita for Śantanu, is said to have procured rainfall for his patron.⁴ The hymn which alludes to this incident seems to consist of two sections. Stanzas eight to twelve, addressed to Agni for the usual

¹ cf. Gonda - Epithets in the Rgveda, p.80.

² The word may be derived from the roots hve to call or hu to pour libations.

³ X.I.6.

⁴ X.98.7.

blessings with an emphasis on rainfall,¹ constitute the main theme. The reference to Devāpi who is said to have kindled Agni, and the request to Parjanya the rain-god² lead to the description of the original sacrifice in the first five verses. The sixth sums up the main points and appears to be the concluding stanza of this section. The whole episode is summarized in the seventh verse which connects the two sections.³

The importance attached to Brhaspati,⁴ his suggestion of bestowing brilliant speech on Devāpi,⁵ presumably to equip him for the task, and the willingness of the latter to act as the hotr at the direction of the god,⁶ are the salient features of this narrative which clearly states that Devāpi was acting on behalf of Śantanu,⁷ but does not refer to him as the purohita. Devāpi's purohitaship is mentioned in the seventh verse as an event of the past. The hymn neither contains any suggestion that Devāpi and Śantanu were brothers nor offers any explanation for the obstruction of rain by the gods.⁸ These details are supplied in the story quoted as an old legend⁹ by Yaska. Devāpi and Śantanu, according to this narrative, were Kuru princes. Devāpi, the older brother, is said to have retired to the forest to practice tapas, when the latter usurped the throne. Annoyed by this transgression,

¹ v.10,12.

² v.8.

³ cf. Geldner's note on X.98. Der.RV. III, p.308.

⁴ v.1.

⁵ v.2.

⁶ v.4 & 5.

⁷ v.1 & 3.

⁸ v.6. āpo devebhir nivrtā atisthan. ⁹ Nir - II.10.

the gods withheld the rain from Śantanu's kingdom for twelve years. Śantanu, on learning the cause of this misfortune from the Brāhmanas, requested his brother to accept the kingdom. But Devāpi offered to intercede on his brother's behalf in order to propitiate the gods.

All the later versions of the story, that occur with some variations in the Brhad-devatā,¹ the Mahābhārata² and the Purānas,³ agree that the two princes were brothers, accept Devāpi as the real claimant, extol his virtues and describe him as retiring to the forest when deprived of his inheritance.⁴ A significant alteration, which reflects the change in social values, is the imputation of a skin disease to Devāpi.⁵ This provides a justification for depriving him of his right and thus eliminates the necessity of his conducting the sacrifice to pacify the gods, as it was becoming increasingly difficult in the changed social conditions to account for a Ksatriya acting as a priest. Another effective solution of such problems - to make these controversial figures attain Brahmanhood by exceptional means - was also tried. Thus Devāpi,

¹ Br.Dev. - VII. 155-7; VIII. 1-6.

² The story is narrated in the Mbh. Adi and Udyoga parva and the Harivaṃśa.

³ Viṣ.P. - IV.20.7 ff, IV.24.44 ff.; Mat.P. - 49.39 ff. Bhāg.P. - IX.22.17 ff.

⁴ Muir - OST, I. pp.269 ff.

⁵ cf. Spellman, J.W. - 'The Legend of Devāpi', in JRAS pt. 4, 1959, pp.95ff.

together with Viśvāmitra, Sindhu^hdvīpa and Ā^hrtisena is said to have acquired brāhmaṇya at the sacred spot Prthūdaka.¹

It is neither proper nor safe to draw any inference about Devāpi's relationship to Śantanu and deduce his caste affiliations in the Rgvedic period on the basis of the later legend. But the persistent prevalence of the Devāpi legend, the continued agreement in its main features and the obvious efforts to remove the possibility of his acting as a priest, indicate that the legend quoted in the Nirukta had some basis of reality. Though the classes had crystallized by the time of Yāska and it was impossible for a Ksatriya to act as a priest, no explanatory remarks are attached to the story. This shows that it was either so widely current that it could not be tampered with or that some extenuating circumstance well known in Yāska's time made Devāpi's priesthood look less like a transgression. The confidence of Devāpi of the Kuru clan in his authority to act as a priest indicates that he considered himself sufficiently proficient in the sacrificial lore to undertake the

¹ Mbh, Sāya parva, cf. Weber-Ind.St., I, p.203.

priestly duties. Incidentally, the words bharata and kuru cited in the plural, are included among the synonyms of rtvij in the Nighantu.¹ The words in the traditional lists of this section are claimed to have been selected from the Samhitās.² Would it be fanciful to surmise that the inclusion of the Bharatas and the Kurus among the words for an officiating priest, suggests the possibility of the members of these tribes acting as such? These words, that look so out of place in the context of a rtvij, recall the days when the Aryans in general³ and the members of the five tribes in particular⁴ were entitled to offer oblations on their own. The calm assertion of Devāpi would suggest a survival of this tradition at least among the leading families of the Kurus.

As this is the only reference to Devāpi and his duties in the Rgveda, it is difficult to decide if he was a regular purohita or was appointed for the duration of the rites performed to procure rainfall.⁵ The divine gift of speech mentioned in the hymn may have been prompted by the urgency of the occasion, or necessitated by

¹ Nigh - III.18.

² Nir. - I.1.

³ I.84.2, yaજ્ઞમ ca mānuṣāṇām, VI.2. 2-5, carṣanayaḥ, mānuṣaḥ janāḥ. X.150.2, martāsaḥ.

⁴ IX, 65.23; X.45.6; cf. X.53.4,5.

⁵ cf. Br. Dev. - VIII.6. sa cāśya cakre karmāṇi vārṣikāṇi yathāvidhi.

Devāpi's unfamiliarity with the function of the hotr. Similarly it is not certain if the voluntary offer of Devāpi in the Nirukta version arose from the belief that the gods accept only the offerings of those kings who have a purohita, or it was a gesture to convince the gods that he did not resent the impropriety of Śantanu's action. In either case the offer implies that Devāpi's purohitaship was temporary. That he was not a regular purohita is also suggested by the account in the Brhad-devatā, which states that Devāpi was appointed for ārtvijya, the office or duties of a sacrificing priest.¹

Though this late reference raises the controversial issues of Devāpi's caste and the possibility of a Ksatriya acting as the priest, it confirms the suggestion that the word purohita began to be used for the priest towards the close of the Rgvedic period.

It is essential to ascertain the significance of the words brahman and purohita when applied to Vasistha in the Rgveda,² as this forms the basis of the assumed identity of these priests.³ In the later Vedic period this identity is supported by the association of the offices of the brahman⁴ and the purohita⁵ with

¹ Br. Dev. Ind. - VIII.6. tatas-tam tu puroṣḍhatta ārtvijyāya sa Śantanuh. This sentence is translated by Macdonell as 'Then Śantanu appointed him to be his chaplain and to act as priest'. The insertion of 'and' is not justified by the text. Macdonell-Tr. of Br. Dev. HOS, 6, p.294.

² VII.33.11 and X.150.5 respectively.

³ Macdonell - HSL, pp.193, 195.

⁴ AB - VII.16; Śan ŚS. XV.21.4.

⁵ Śan ŚS - XVI.11.4.

with Vasistha and his family.

The hymn¹ which refers to Vasistha as brahman² is a panegyric of the glory,³ achievements⁴ and the mystic knowledge⁵ of Vasistha and his descendants. In order to emphasize the greatness of the seer, his birth is traced from the gods Mitra and Varuna and the celestial nymph Urvaśī.⁶ The god Yama is said to have spun a special vesture for him.⁷ As Vasistha receives the epithet brahman in this context, it seems doubtful that the word really indicates the brahman priest,⁸ who would be irrelevant in this setting. The epithet, however, is appropriate for the seer who is a rsi,⁹ a favourite of Indra,¹⁰ is welcomed by the gods and is connected with divine brahman.¹¹ The word thus appears to be a confirmatory adjective of Vasistha, whose brahman is credited with deeds of protection,¹² and the praise-songs composed by him and his family are said to be unrivalled.¹³

¹ VII.33.

² V.11.

³ V.8.

⁴ V.3-6.

⁵ V.7,9,12.

⁶ V.10,11.

⁷ V.9,12.

⁸ Geldner translates it as 'Hoherpriester', Der RV., II,p.213.

⁹ V.13. cf. VII.88.4, Varuṇa makes Vasistha a rsi.

¹⁰ V.2,5.

¹¹ V.11. drapsam skannam brāhmaṇā daiḥvyena viśve devāḥ puṣkare tvādadanta.

¹² V.3.

¹³ V.8.

The meaning of the word purohita in connection with Vasistha is less definite. He is qualified as such in a late hymn, which is ascribed to his descendant Mrdika.¹ The authorship seems to be suggested by the recurrence of mr̥dika as the penultimate word of every verse, preceded and followed by the same word, which differs from verse to verse. In the last verse of the hymn. Vasistha, qualified as purohita, invokes Agni who is said to have helped Atri, Bharadvāja, Gavisthira, the composer (nah), Kanva and Trasadasyu.² The previous verse describes Agni as the purohita among the gods,³ and as kindled by saintly men.⁴ The peculiar literary style makes it difficult to decide whether Vasistha is acting as the purohita for Mrdika or invoking Agni for help and favour.⁵ The hymn neither offers any reason for Vasistha being thus qualified, nor alludes to any function generally assigned to a purohita priest. Usually a purohita is mentioned with the person for whom he acts; although among the persons obliged by Agni. Trasadasyu happens to be a king⁶

¹ X.150.5; verses 25-27 of the hymn IX.97 composed by Vasistha and the members of his family, are also ascribed to Mr̥dika.

² Agnir Atrim Bharadvājam Gavisthiram prāvan nah Kanvam Trasadasyum-āhave. Agnim Vasistho havate purohito mr̥dikāya purohitah.

³ See above, p.203, n.3.

⁴ See above, p.179.

⁵ cf. the use of this word as an adj. of Agni in v.4.

⁶ V.33.8; VII.19.3, etc; Ved.Ind. I, pp.327-8.

and is said to have received aid in a battle, Vasistha is in no way connected with him. It is quite probable that the changing concept of the word and the later claim of Vasisthas resulted in the seer being thus qualified. If the word mrđīka is taken to refer to a relation of Vasistha then purohita would have to be understood in its literal sense, unless it is assumed that Vasistha was the purohita priest of his family.

There is no particular reason for the claim of the Vasisthas to the office of the purohita, as they are not especially associated with the Atharva-veda¹ to which the latter was affiliated. Affinity with this Samhitā led to the association of the purohitas with the brahman priests and gave them the epithet Āngirasa.² Though their special qualifications are not explicitly stated for the office of the brahman priest, nevertheless they claimed it as their prerogative. According to the Taittirīya Samhitā, Vasistha, among all the ṛsis, was successful in seeing Indra who promised to disclose a 'holy lore' (brāhmaṇa) to him and assured him that henceforth people would be propagated with Vasistha as their purohita.³ The narrative casually adds that a member of his family should therefore be chosen as a brahman priest, as if it was a

¹ Bloomfield - Hymns of AV., p.LXV.

² AV - X.1.6; PB - XII.8.6; GB - II.2,4.

³ TS - III.5.2.1.

natural sequence of being a purohita. This claim is supported by the Kāthaka Samhitā¹ and the Gopatha² and the Pañcavimśa Brāhmanas.³ The latter curiously substitutes Bharatas for the general term prajā, and thus gives an idea how the claim probably originated. The Vasisthas whose competition with Viśvāmitra for the favour of Sudās and his descendants is depicted in the Vedic literature,⁴ would appear to have invented this right in order to completely oust their rivals.⁵ The additional claim regarding ^{the} function of the brahman priest was probably put forward to ensure the continuity of their hold on the ritual ceremonial. It is doubtful if this demand of the Vasisthas, established in the later literature, could be traced to the hymns of the Rgveda. It is significant that the verses referring to Vasistha as the purohita or the brahman are not cited in this connection, in spite of the general tendency of the priests to quote supporting verses from the Rgveda to strengthen their claims and interpretations.

References in the Rgveda to the god Brhaspati as a purohita⁶

¹ KS - XXXVII.17.

² GB - 11.2.13.

³ PB - XV.5.24.

⁴ Viśvāmitra - III.53.9-13; Nir II.24; Muir - OST, I, pp.237 ff. Vasistha - VII.18.4-5, 21-25; VII.33.1-6; Muir - ibid., pp.317 ff. AB - VII; KB - 4;8; Weber - Ind.St., II, pp.299 ff.

⁵ cf. PB - XV.5.24, tato vai vasistha-purohitāḥ Bharatāḥ prājāyanta.

⁶ II.24.9.

and a brahman,¹ are taken to confirm the close association of these priests. This confirmation is a doubtful issue as it is not certain if the words, in this context, actually point to the priestly aspect of the god or express their primary meaning. Three other attributes are used for Brahmanaspati in the verse which associates him with the word purohita.² The latter is used without the pronoun sah which accompanies other adjectives. The word can thus be taken independently³ or with either of the contiguous terms. In either case the literal meaning is more suitable, and honouring Brhaspati by placing him in the forefront is not unusual. The ancient deep-thinking sages are said to have placed Brhaspati before them.⁴

It is difficult to ascribe a priestly connotation to the word brahman in all the passages where it occurs in the Rgveda. It would be better therefore to ascertain its meaning in the verse where it is used with Brhaspati in a late hymn⁵ addressed to the "all gods". (Viśvedevāh). Three of the gods referred to in this hymn receive epithets expressing their characteristic attributes. Soma is

¹ X.141.3.

² II.24.9, sa samnayah sa vinayah purohitah sa sustah^{ut} sa yudhi Brāhmanaspatih.

³ cf. Sāyana and Geldner on this verse. They treat it as an independent word, and accept its literal sense.

⁴ IV.50.1, puro... dadhire.

⁵ X.141.3.

qualified as rājan, Brhaspati is addressed as brahman, and Savitr is called vājin.¹ The accepted interpretation 'brahman priest', seems irrelevant here. On the other hand brahman would be a confirmatory epithet of the god also called Brahmanaspati in this hymn.²

The word brahman is used for Brhaspati in another hymn which is often quoted to illustrate the power of the purohita or the pretensions of the Brāhmaṇs in the Rgveda.³ The hymn addressed to Brhaspati is apparently related to ritual performance,⁴ and the common hope of Vedic people, which is expressed in general terms by the seer Vāmadeva. 'may we become the lords of riches and noble progeny,'⁵ contains no suggestion of the unexpected introduction of the eulogy of the king who cherishes Brhaspati.⁶ The reference to Brhaspati in this verse gives the illusion of continuing the theme of the hymn, but the following stanzas completely break off the link. These verses embark on the benefits a king obtains by giving precedence to a brahman in the spirit of similar assertions in the

¹ X.141.5.

² Brahmanaspati: the god rarely receives an epithet, Goṅḍa, J. - Epithets in the Rgveda, p.115.

³ IV.50.8-9.

⁴ v.10, cf. v.6.

⁵ v.6.

⁶ v.7.

Atharva-veda and the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa. After this abrupt interlude, the connection with the main theme is established by a joint prayer to Indra and Brhaspati, the divine representatives of the mortal king and his purohita. As the sixth verse looks like a concluding stanza with its assurance of sacrificial gifts and material expectations in return, these three verses appear to be interpolated. The last two verses referring to Indra, who is not mentioned before in the hymn, seem to have been appended probably to bring it into conformity with the preceding hymn addressed to Indra and Brhaspati.

Some semblance of a complete unit may be restored to this otherwise disjointed hymn, if the word brahman in the eighth and the ninth stanzas is taken to refer to Brhaspati. The description of the god in the hymn purely as a deity precludes the possibility of associating him with the priestly functions of the brahman priest. If brahman is interpreted as denoting a priest, its use as a natural complement to the king and the emphatic instructions to the latter to give him preference will point to the purohita.¹ This is supported by the eighth book of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, which begins with the sentence brahma-purastān ma ugram rāstram-avyathyam.

¹ Bloomfield - Hymns of AV, p.LXVIII, n.3.

The three verses under discussion are then cited to substantiate the claims of the purohitas, and their importance is discussed while recounting the advantages of the sacrifice called Aindra Mahābhiseka for the king.

It is thus clear that references, in the Rgveda, to Brhaspati as brāhman or purohita cannot be treated as conclusive evidence as regards the early identity of these priests. As these offices develop and become firmly associated with Brhaspati in the later literature, the references also become more definite.

The pre-occupation of the later Vedic literature with establishing the antiquity of the sacrificial ritual and the insistence on maintaining its pure form were probably a cover for the inevitable modifications and changes arising from the impact of popular and assimilated cults. An effective method of keeping up the fiction of the purity and the antiquity of the ritual was to assign the priestly offices primarily to the gods and to treat the human priests as their counterparts. This helped to maintain the illusion of the continuity of the ancient traditional form of the ritual.

The emergence of monarchy and the consolidation of its power, that accompanied territorial gains,¹ and stability, seem to have led

¹ Altekar, A.S. - State and Govt. in Anct. India. p.25, 57-58;
Beni Prasad - The State in Ancient India, pp.25,43.

to the elaboration of the sacrifices useful to the kings.¹ Such sacrifices and their important details are usually traced to the perpetual conflict between the gods and the Asuras in which the gods, temporarily defeated through the lack of a king² or a purohita,³ are shown rushing to seek the advice of their purohita Brhaspati.⁴ The same god takes on the function of the brāhman priest of the gods in connection with the performance of the sacrifices on behalf of the gods. ~~of the~~ Brhaspati is referred to as the brāhman when the duties of this priest are laid down.⁵ He is expected to protect the sacrifice as the divine brāhman, and is carefully reminded by his human counterpart that the latter is his representative on earth.⁶

When the importance of the office and the functions of the purohita are emphasized, Brhaspati is given the rôle of a model purohita priest. The sacrificers are assured that their victory is as certain as was that of the gods under the guidance of their

¹ Aśvamedha, Rājasūya, Vājapeya and Aindra Mahābhiṣeka.
cf. ŚB - XIII.4.4.3; TB - XVIII.10.10.

² AB - I.14; TB - II.2.7.2; JB - III.152.

³ cf. AV - IV.22; TS - I.8.16; TB - I.7.10; I.5.9.

⁴ Sān ŚS - XIV.23.1.

⁵ KB - VI.13; ŚB - I.7.4.21.

⁶ Śān ŚS - IV.6.9.

purohita Brhaspati.¹ The sacrifices recommended to the aspirants for this office are said to have been first performed by Brhaspati.² At the time of coronation a king is advised to offer oblations to Brhaspati in the house of his purohita, one of the eight jewel bearers and the representative of the divine priest.³

It is apparent that the same person could and did combine the functions of both the priests, but the distinction between their respective functions and designations seems always to have been maintained. The relative position of these priests is well defined in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.⁴ The priests were in a dilemma as regards the Kṣatriya sacrificer's share of the offering. He could not be permitted to eat it, as Kṣatriyas were not entitled to eat the sacrificial offering (ahutād). But as the offering represented the sacrifice, he could not be cut off from it by withholding his share. The priests, adept at convenient solutions, found a way out by allotting the share to the brāhmaṇ priest with the explanation that he was actually in the place of purohita - the alter-ego of the king. This shows that the brāhmaṇ was regarded in the same relation to a king as the purohita, but that ~~the~~ ^{However} this relationship was not direct, but was established through the

¹ AB - III.17.

² TS - VII.4.1.1; TB - II.7.1.2; cf. PB - XV.4.7; Kāt.ŚS - XXII.5.11; 11.8; 11.16.

³ ŚB - V.3.1.2.

⁴ AB - VII.26. purohitāyatanam vā etat Kṣatriyasya yad brāhmaṇārdhātmo ha vā Kṣatriyasya yat-purohitah.

latter. The brāhman priest was thus responsible for the ritual interests and rights of the Ksatriya sacrifices.

The offices of the purohita and the brāhman are closely associated in the later Samhitās and the Brāhmanas. Both the priests supervised the interests of their employers, the brāhman in ritual matters and the purohita in secular. The latter, more precisely defined as rāja-karmāni, include submission of the subjects, suppression of the enemy and the security of the state.¹ An additional service, passively rendered by the purohita, was that of lending his pravaras for the use of his patrons,² when these became important in the sacrificial ritual and lack of pravaras presented an obstacle to those non-Brāhmans who wished to participate in it.

The association of these two offices with the same individual, the affinity of functions and the claim of the Atharvan literature that both should be adherents of the Atharva-veda have led scholars to assume their original identity. The comparatively close association of these priestly offices, in spite of the distinction in their spheres of activity, also suggested the possibility that one of them may have influenced the development

¹ AB - VIII.24-28; Müller - HASL, p.476, 486; Weber - Ind.St, I, p.16.

² AB - VII.25; cf. VII.31; Śān.ŚS - I.4.16; Āśy.GS - I.3.1-3.

of the other. Of the two priests, the brāhman with his knowledge of the procedure of sacrifices and the attached theological speculations,¹ was not likely to be of much use for the practical secular interests of a king. The expert knowledge of the Atharvan charms which equipped the domestic priest for his duties was not likely to qualify him for conducting Śrauta sacrifices satisfactorily. Bloomfield therefore interpreted the insistence of the Atharvan literature in claiming the brāhman as an adherent of their Samhitā, as suggestive of the probability that the kings, in the absence of a systematic theologian, may have appointed the domestic priest to supervise their Śrauta sacrifices.² It is suggested that the domestic priest, even without the necessary knowledge, was not likely to find it difficult to supervise such sacrifices as the regular officiants could be relied upon to discharge their duties properly. Bloomfield also thinks that the duties of the brāhman priest were later developed in the Atharvan circles to bring his function into conformity with the other priestly offices.³

The problem of the identity of these priests is made more

¹ cf. X.71.11; Bloomfield - Hymns of AV, p.LXIX.

² These claims are neither confirmed nor refuted by the followers of the other Samhitās with the exception of the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa, which recommends that the brāhman should be a bahvrca, KB - VI.11.

³ Bloomfield - Hymns of AV, p.LXX.

complicated by restricting the discussion to the purohitas employed by the nobility, though it is admitted that his function was primarily that of a domestic priest.¹ The belief in the competence of a properly propitiated supernatural agency to fulfill all human desires, which is reflected in the Vedic literature, indicates a wider demand for the services of a domestic priest. This supposition is supported by the survival of the purohita through all the vicissitudes of three thousand years to the present day.

It thus appears reasonable to suppose that a purohita was also employed by common people provided they could afford his services. Though it is obvious that the ritual ceremonial described at length in the Brāhmanas was meant for the aristocracy, it is improbable that the ritual as such was restricted to the kings or the nobles. Frequent references in the Rgveda to the kindling of Agni and offering of oblations by common men suggest simple unadorned sacrifices. There is also no reason to doubt that the talent of Hindu priests for adopting a rite or ceremony to suit the varying means of their yajamānas was lacking in the Vedic times. The flexibility of the ceremonial and the bewildering options in its details must have proved helpful in simplifying the elaborate

¹ Ved.Ind., II, p.5.

sacrifices, provided it suited the interests of the priests. This is illustrated by the description of the same sacrifices in the Śrauta Sūtras as well as in the domestic ritual depending on the number of Fires and the priests who were employed.

It is thus not improbable that there were other purohitas, hotrs and brāhmans than those employed by the kings, and that their functions were not entirely meant to please or satisfy the royal demands. The priests in general seem to have mainly depended for their living on teaching, officiating at the sacrifice or conducting the personal rites for the nobility and laity. Members of the early priesthood would appear to enjoy the freedom of combining these functions with other obligatory tribal activities. The rtvij engaged for the duration of one sacrifice were most probably free to accept a different office in the next, to continue to impart the sacrificial lore during the interval, or to get themselves attached to some noble or chief. Theoretically there appears to have been nothing to prevent a priest from combining any of these functions provided the prospective yajamāna¹ accepted him in one or the other of them. The offices would tend to become hereditary with the trend towards

¹ cf. AB - V.23. special rites are recommended for the learned brahman who is unable to achieve yaśas, presumably the ability to get invitations for officiating etc.

specialization. The domestic priest of the chief could hardly expect the freedom of officiating for others unless he was prepared to yield to his employer the corresponding privilege of changing his purohita. The sphere of activity of a purohita thus becomes narrower and he seems to fade out of the ritual instead of getting into it.

In a śrauta sacrifice performed on behalf of the king, his purohita might be expected to act as the hotr or the brāhman priest according to the comparative importance of the office at the time and his own qualifications. The chances are that he would become less eligible as the specialization increased. The references to Vasistha as the brāhman of Janamejaya,¹ and the purohita of Sudās² do not imply the identity of these offices so much as the freedom and competence of a priest to undertake different functions. If it could be conclusively shown that Vasistha acting for Janamejaya was the same person as the purohita of Sudās, it would confirm the suggestion that the priests in the beginning were able to combine different functions.

The limited influence of the purohita in ritual is also suggested by the continuation of the Soma ritual after the

¹ AB - VII.16; Śān.ŚS - XV.21.4.

² Implied in RV - VII.83; Śān.ŚS - XVI.11.14.

discontinuation of the important royal sacrifices. Survival of the former indicates that it was not entirely dependent upon the kings or the advocacy of their purohitas. like the latter ritual.

The later Samhitās and the Brāhmanas, especially the Aitareya, whose last section is almost a textbook on this topic, exalt the purohitas in connection with the ruling chiefs and their preoccupation with conquest. On the one hand most attractive inducements are offered to the chiefs in the form of emphatic assertions that nothing can go wrong in the kingdom of the ruler who has a vigilant purohita.¹ On the other the pleasant prospects of the office are acknowledged and the candidates are encouraged by devising special sacrifices said to have been performed by Brhaspati to attain the position of purohita.² This is an indication of the ideal of the union between the brāhman and ksatra powers, which is set forth in the later literature.³

In order to safeguard their privileges,⁴ the purohitas, in the later period, describe the calamities suffered by the kings who dared to encroach upon these rights or defied their purohitas.

¹ AV - III.19.1-4; VS - IX.23; XI.8; AB - VIII.1,25,27.

² See above, p.233, n.2.

³ KS - XXVII.4; KapS - XLII.3; MS - IV.5.8; AB - III.11 etc.

⁴ cf. AB - VIII.24.

But the Vedic literature is content to set forth the claims and narrate the benefits that arise from appointing a purohita. The repercussions on the rulers are given in relation to the Brāhmans in general.¹ The injured feelings of the dismissed purohitas seem to have been gratified by manipulating their reinstallation.²

The influence of the purohitas over the kings cannot be doubted, but their actual enjoyment of extravagant privileges appears dubious. The submission of the purohitas to their employers, that is evident from some of the Vedic episodes, is contrary to their exaggerated claims and raises the doubt whether their pretensions represent an ideal or a fact. The didactic tales dealing with recalcitrant rulers first appear in the Atharva-veda and are elaborated in the classical literature to deter the kings from encroaching upon the privileges of the Brāhmans.³ These stories rarely mention the purohita and also carefully point out that the kings had wronged the Brāhmans and had violated the established religious conventions. A purohita does not seem to be indicated in the Atharva-veda in the bitter outpourings against the rulers who dared to confiscate a Brāhman's cow.⁴ The word brāhmana used here would seem to include all the sections of this class and not

¹ AV - V.18 & 19; XII.5; XIII.3.

² cf. AB - VII.27.

³ Mbh, Adi, 75.20; Śānti, 60.39.

⁴ AV - V.19.

particularly the purohita.

The anti-purohita hints embedded in the Brāhmanical literature give a glimpse of reality and thus furnish valuable evidence about their actual position. Their extravagant assertions, when taken in the context of such suggestions found in the Brāhmanas, appear to be an indication of their precarious position. All their ingenious devices could not alter the fact that the king was a powerful master and was not likely to submit meekly to the unreasonable demands of his purohita.¹ The claim of the purohita to be as close to the king as his wife and son and the demand to have a share in his pleasures.² have the appearance of a clever device invented by anxious purohitas rather than the confident expression of their firm hold over the king. In spite of harsh predictions backed by past examples,³ the rulers do not seem to have hesitated in defying their purohitas, if the latter became too presumptuous.

To explain a detail during the process of filtering. Soma the king is described as oppressing his purohita Brhaspati,⁴ who is

¹ For the position of the purohita in the earlier portions of the Mbh., Hopkins, E.W. - 'The Social and Military position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India', JAOS, 13, 1889, pp. 162 ff.

² AB - VIII.24.

³ According to Hopkins such stories contain germs of ancient contempt for the priests, ibid., pp. 158-9.

⁴ SB - IV.1.2.4.

said to have been reconciled later. A passage in the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa shows that the king could oppress the Brāhmaṇ, if he felt inclined to do so.¹ In the context of dismissed purohitas a Brāhmaṇ is defined as 'liable to be removed at will'.² Indra is said to have killed Viśvarūpa, and though their relation is not specified the latter appears to have been a Brāhmaṇ.³ As a result Indra was excluded from drinking Soma; hence the Ksatriyas are not allowed to partake of it.

The disputes between Janamejaya and his priests the Kaśyapas, and between Viśvantara and the Śyāparnas are mentioned in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.⁴ It appears that these kings wished to proceed with the intended sacrifice without their regular priests. Viśvantara justified the exclusion by describing the Śyāparnas as sinful and speaking impious words.⁵ In both these instances the deposed priests tried to convince the kings of their usefulness and ultimately succeeded in reconciling them through a spokesman. No threats of calamities or curses are mentioned and the objection appears to be not about the right of the king to dismiss the priest

¹ TB - III.9.14 yadā vai rājā kāmāyate atha brāhmaṇam jināti.

² AB - VII.29.

³ AB - VII.28.

⁴ AB - VII.27.

⁵ ibid. - pāpasya vā ime karmanah kartāra āsate śpūtāyai vāco vaditārah.....imān utthāpayata.

but the propriety of the action. The order of Viśvantara to drive out the insistent priests does not show any awareness of their sanctity and is far from polite.

The stories given in the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa are even more conclusive in illustrating the true position of the purohita and the king. Kutsa Aurava had forbidden his purohita to offer oblations to Indra.¹ When Indra appeared to demand his share, the priest preferred to disobey his master rather than incur the displeasure of the god. Annoyed by this disregard of his orders the king beheaded the priest and does not appear to have suffered any evil consequences. Another episode shows that the purohita could be held responsible for the mistakes of the king. Tryaruna, a king of the Ikṣvāku family, blames his purohita for not averting the accident when his horses run over a Brāhmaṇ boy.² The purohita had to bring the boy back to life in order to live up to the high expectations of his office and to pacify the king.

Incidentally, Tryaruna is one of the many Ikṣvāku kings who are said to have had serious differences with their priests. The legend of the Gaupāyanas and Asamāti, noted in the Brhad-devatā,

¹ PB - XIV.6.8.

² PB - XIII.3.12.

is mentioned by Sāyana.¹ The story is of uncertain date but its inclusion shows the acceptance of its main points that Asamāti was known to be an Aiksvāka, had dismissed his purohita and had appointed Asura priests. Another Iksvāku ruler Triśanku figures in the conflict of Vasistha and Viśvāmitra.² His preference for the latter adds complications to the rivalry of the seers. But Nimi's is the most significant case of an Aiksvāka king who quarrelled with his purohita.³ He retaliated instead of submitting meekly to the curse of his unreasonable purohita Vasistha. It is significant that the curse of the king was as effective on the purohita as that of the purohita on the king.⁴ Could it be possible that these episodes refer to a tradition of the disagreement of the Iksvākus with the priestly claims of the Brāhman class, that appears to have asserted itself from time to time.

These stories embedded in the sacred literature show that the purohitas, in spite of their pretensions, were expected to keep within the conventional limits that both parties were supposed to respect. Violation of these limits brought repercussions. The

¹ In his commentary on RV - X.57.1; JB - III.167.

² Rām, Bāl, chaps.51-65; Mbh, ^{Act} 1.175; Harivaṃśa - sections 12-13;

³ ViṣP - IV.5.6; Muir, OST, I, pp.316-7.

⁴ Bhāg.P. - IX.13.1-13.

significant difference between the legends related in the Vedic and the classical literature is that the former describes the dismissal of the purohitas without its leading to any sinister reactions. But the Epics, the Purāṇas and the Smṛtis, in keeping with their didactic character, paint these kings in very dark colours as disregarding the established conventions in religious matters. Care is also taken to give an ideal character to the Brāhmins who are the objects of disrespect.¹

It appears that the office of the purohita was in the process of formation during the Rgvedic period. The main feature of the office, mediation on behalf of the employer, was known, but its identity had not distinctly developed. A proper designation is the first indication of the growing importance of the office. Devāpi and Vasistha are directly qualified as purohitas, and seers like Viśvāmitra and Kuruśravana are associated with functions later assigned to a purohita.

It is quite possible that in the beginning one priest could combine the duties of conducting the Śrauta and domestic sacrifices and the rājakarman, which gradually became hereditary due to specialization. Along with the emergence of the tribal chief as a powerful ruler, his domestic priest also seems to have

¹ cf. Manu - VII. 38-42.

been established as the influential purohita. Thus the development and the consolidation of the monarchy and the office of the purohita would appear to be concurrent. The purohita seems to have been exalted to counteract the growing power of the king in the Vedic aristocracy, which comprised both the brahman and the ksatra powers enjoying almost equal status.

The explanation of the Maitrāvaruṇa graha implies that the offer of union was proposed by the Ksatriya.¹ Varuṇa, the ksatra power, is said to have requested Mitra, the personified brahman, to unite with him in order to gain success. The brahman is promised the honour of precedence, in other words the office of the purohita.² This explanation may be a priestly device to emphasize the importance of priestly guidance and to show that it was invited by the ruling chiefs.

The Vedic literature from the Rgveda onwards shows ample signs of the assimilation of non-Aryan elements into the priestly and ruling classes.³ The references to the Asura Brāhmanas and the non-Vedic ṛsis, who are described as familiar with the Vedic ritual though introducing their own deviations,⁴ suggest that the priests

¹ ŚB - IV.1.4.4; cf. KS - XXVII.4.

² ibid. . . . purastvā karavāvahī.

³ See above, pp. 105 ff.

⁴ See above, p. 115.

had probably devised ways and means to impart proficiency in the Vedic lore to fresh entrants to their ranks. As such training was not necessary for the kingly function, it seems that the assimilated indigenous rulers were enjoined to follow the guidance of the purohita. The importance of such guidance was strengthened by the general emphasis on the necessity of the union of brahman and ksatra, in which the former was given greater importance and which was promulgated as an ideal in the later Vedic period.¹

It is pointed out that one who is neither a Ksatriya, nor a purohita is not a whole being;² each is recommended to exercise the utmost caution in the selection of the other. A king is strongly advised against appointing any Brāhman as a purohita without discrimination, and the latter is warned to be cautious in choosing a patron, as both together are responsible for the good or the evil committed by them.³ Both brahman and ksatra are said to be equally represented in Agni,⁴ but the dictum is also laid down that the kingly power is not effective against its origin, *the*

¹ Kap. S. - XLII.3; MS - IV.5.8; AB - III.11.

² ŚB - VI.6.3.12; Eggeling - The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, III, p.259

³ ŚB - IV.1.4.5.

⁴ ŚB - VI.6.3.14.

brāhman. This may be a precautionary measure against the commands of kings such as Kutsa Aurava, who forbade worship of Indra, or Asamāti who is said to have appointed Asura Brāhmans.

The purohitas, with the sanction of the ritual circles strengthened their hold in political matters and tenaciously clung to their advantageous position till their influence was undermined by the diminishing faith in the Vedic royal sacrifices.¹ The purohita relapsed to his original status of the domestic priest, and was largely replaced in his political functions by Brāhman ministers. The period of his ascendancy must have shed its glow on the class as a whole, but cannot be regarded as the main cause of the supremacy of the Brāhmans. The importance of the purohita seems to have resulted in the orientation of the ritual towards the kingly power, and in its acquiring a more definite political content.

¹ cf. Altekar - State and Govt. in Anct. India, p.121.

CHAPTER VII

Bráhmaṇ

The use of the word brāhmaṇa in the later Samhitās for various religious functionaries appears to have facilitated the consolidation of the sacerdotal class. It enabled the individuals who pursued non-priestly activities to retain the class membership to which they were eligible by their birth. The adjectival character of the earlier words limited their connotation and confined their application to functional groups. Terms like kavi and dhīra suggested an attribute, vipra and kāru implied a functionary, rsi expressed sanctity or holiness and words like purohita and rtvij denoted a particular office and officiant respectively. None of these words were thus comprehensive enough to combine the various priestly groups under a single head.

In the Rgveda the word brāhmaṇa denotes the cup allotted to the brahmaṇ (brāhmaṇācchamsin) priest for drinking Soma,¹ a learned priest or individual,² and implies veneration when applied to the pitrs.³ It began to be applied to the sacrificial

¹ RV - I.15.5; II.36.5. The identification of the two priests is suggested in SB - IV.6.6.5; Oldenberg - Rel. des veda, pp.396-7.

² RV - I.164.45; VII.103.7,8; X.16.6 etc.

³ RV - VI.75.10.

explanations and hence to the texts which contained them and finally it settled down to denote the priestly class and its members.

This diversity of connotations may be attributed to its inheriting the various aspects of the concepts conveyed by the masculine and the neuter brahman. The masculine form was the designation of the superintending priest and also implied composers of hymns.¹ Later Brāhman also became the appellation of the personal god, the creator and the figurative head of the Hindu triad.

Brāhman in the neuter denoted a prayer or formula to persuade or induce the gods to bestow the desired objects on the reciter, and hence the Vedas - the collection of such prayers and formulae. The epithet lord of prayer (jyestharājam brahmanām) applied to Brāhmanaspati indicates that the word in this compound was understood in its primary sense.² The neuter form is also used for supernatural power especially inherent in mantras and other sacred formulae, in contrast to kṣatra - physical energy, which also has in some contexts a rather supernatural character and was particularly connected with the warriors and chiefs. After passing

¹ Muir - OST, I, p.243; See below, pp. 305 ff.

² R.V. II.23.1; cf. II.23.2; VII.97.3.

through a number of equations with the god Brhaspati,¹ the Vedas,² the sacrifice,³ and the fire,⁴ brahman in the neuter ultimately came to signify the supreme spirit - the immutable and the eternal substratum of the universe.

The wide range of diverse meanings expressed by the word brahman makes it very difficult to assign to it a central concept, which would satisfactorily explain its various associations from the Rgveda to the Upanisads. Towards the close of the Vedic period, the word is taken to denote the Vedas except in the philosophical context where it is understood as the Absolute.

The later philosophical concept seems to have greatly influenced the quest of recent scholarship for the original connotation of the word brahman. The necessity to trace a link between the Rgvedic brahman, the power substance, the Brāhman and the Absolute makes it essential to assign a special potency to the word in its earliest stage. The importance and the eminence of the abstract and the literary aspects of the word in later literature seem to have encouraged the association of the Brāhman class with both.⁵

¹ TS - III.1.1.4; AB - I.19,30; ŚB - III.9.1.11 etc.

² ŚB - IV.1.1.20; identified with speech, ŚB - II.1.4.10;

³ ŚB - III.1.4.15; V.3.2.4; AB - VII.22.

⁴ ŚB - I.3.3.19; 4.2.2. etc.

⁵ Zaehner - Hinduism, p.7.

The search for the fundamental concept of brāhman is made more complex by the endeavour to connect the semantic evolution of the word brāhman with the chronological development of magic, religion and philosophy in spite of their being almost inextricable in the earlier literature.

Discussions regarding the inherent meaning of the word are either confined to Vedic literature or based on a comparative study of Indo-Iranian religion or Indo-European mythological and ritual analogies. The study of the etymology of the word is also influenced by similar tendencies. Various derivations are suggested in order to accommodate its magical efficacy or to identify or compare it with words denoting similar concepts in Iranian and Indo-European ritual.

Attempts of Western scholars to explain the significance of the neuter and the masculine brāhman date from the Sanskrit Wörterbuch, which assigns seven meanings to the former.¹ The examples cited to illustrate its usage indicate that in the Rgveda it was employed in the first two meanings only. The word is derived from the root barh and is explained as the 'fervent

¹ Böhrtlingk und Roth.

expression of devout sentiments in the service of the gods'.¹ This is followed by 'holy formula', but the idea of special efficacy attached to the word leads to its amendment as 'magic formula'.² The transition of meaning is then traced through 'sacred word and theology' to sacred wisdom, holy life and lastly the Absolute. It is also taken to denote the class which is regarded as the possessor and guardian of the sacred knowledge. Oldenberg first accepted³ the suggestion of Griswold that the fundamental sense of brāhman in the Rgveda is hymn, holy word or Vedic text,⁴ but later emphasized its magical aspect and traced the development of this meaning into 'magic word and the fluid of magic power it is charged with'.⁵ In course of time this is said to have evolved into the potency which characterizes a Brāhman as such and finally leads to the idea of 'Allwesen'.⁶ Brāhman the magic power is said to manifest itself in the person who pre-eminently knows and masters

¹ Skt. Wörterbuch, Böhtlingk und Roth - ibid., 'die als Drang und Fülle des Gemüths auftretende und den Göttern zustrebende Andacht, überh. jede fromme Aeussderung beim Gottesdienst'.

² ibid. heiliger Spruch, namentlich Zauberspruch, = mantra.

³ Oldenberg - 'Zur Religion und Mythologie des Veda', Nach.Gött., 1915, pp.195 ff.; 'Zur Geschichte des Wortes Brāhman', ibid., 1916, p.717.

⁴ Griswold-Brāhman: A study in the history of Ind.Philosophy, New York, 1900.

⁵ 'die heilige (zauberkräftige) Formel und das sie erfüllende Fluidum der Zauberkraft', Oldenberg - Die Religion des Veda, p.65, n.1; Die Weltanschauung der Brahmana Texte, 1919, pp.131,140.

⁶ See above, n. 3

the sacred word. It is then conveyed to the sacrifice prepared by such men, extends its all pervading action to the whole of nature, and ends by denoting the cosmic principle. This is the generally accepted view about the primary concept of the word brahman and its development into the abstract philosophical concept.¹ The etymology suggested by Osthoff that is usually accepted² connects the word with Irish bricht for spell or incantation and the old Icelandic bragr, poetic art.

Haug had earlier pointed out the identification of the word brāhman with the Avestan baresman, the bundle of twigs that were used in the Zoroastrian ceremonies.³ Following the etymology suggested by Benfey,⁴ he derived the word from the root brh, to

¹ Keith - RPVU, II, pp.445-6; Radhakrishnan, S. - Indian Philosophy, 1948, I, p.124; Jacobi, H. - Die Entwicklung der Gottesidee bei den Indern, Bonn-Leipzig, 1923, pp. 3 ff; Masson-Oursel, P. - Esquisse d'une histoire de la philosophie indienne, Paris, 1923, p.53; G. van der Leeuw - Religion in Essence and Manifestation, London, 1938, p.36; H.v.Glasenapp - Die Philosophie der Inder, Stuttgart, 1949.

² Osthoff, M. in Bezenbergers Beiträge, 24, pp.142 ff, cf. Winternitz - HL, I, p.247; Walde, A. - Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch, Heidelberg, 1910, p.298; Feist, S. - Vergl. Wörterbuch der gotischen Sprache, Leiden, 1939, p.101; cf. A.Walde and J.B.Hofmann - Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch, I, Heidelberg, 1938, pp.512 ff; Bergaigne - La Religion Vedique, II, pp.273 ff.

³ Haug, M. - in Sitzungsber.Bayer. Akad.d.Wissen, 1868, II, pp.80 ff; Brahma und die Brahmanen in Vortag.Akad.d.Wiss, München, 1871, pp.5 ff; Haug-Aitareya Brāhmaṇa intro. p.5

⁴ Benfey, Th. - Sāmavedārcikam. Die Hymnen des Sama-veda, Leipzig, 1848, Glossar, p.135.

grow or swell, and understood it as Gewächs, Spross and then Gedeihen.¹ Brähman was next taken to denote the elements, especially the hymns, essential for the success of sacrifice. It then came to be used for the productive power in nature that manifests itself in the growth of plants and creatures and was lastly accorded the meaning of the 'Absolute' which lies at the base of all things.

This view was seldom accepted, but the idea of looking for the solution of the brähman problem in the Iranian context was taken up by Hertel² and Hillebrandt. The former introduced the theory of cosmic fire, which is also mentioned in the Avesta, related the word brahman to flamma and fulgeo, and suggested that it should be interpreted in the light of Greek phlegma flame. Brähman, according to him, implies cosmic fire, which is revealed in the Sun, Moon and constellations and is represented as Atman in man. In the Rgveda the cosmic fire is figuratively implied in that aspect which incorporates wisdom and appears in cosmic Brahman as the power of thought. In order to establish the association between brahman and cosmic fire, Hertel had to assign related meanings to

¹ Plant, sprout, growth.

² Hertel, J. - 'Das brahman' in Indogermanische Forschungen, 41, 1923, pp. 185 ff.; Die Arische Feuerlehre, I, Leipzig, 1925.

the terms yaksa (=Av. cithra), dhenā (=Av. daena) and vasu (= Av. vohu), and had to reconstruct the meaning of the verses where these words occur.¹ This theory is difficult to establish as, in addition to the unusual correspondence of Sanskrit h and Greek g,² the hymns of the Rgveda do not point to any special association of fire and brāhman.³

Hillebrandt's views about the primary concept of the word brāhman and its development reflect the excessive importance he attaches to the magic efficacy of the word.⁴ Like Hertel, he takes the original sense of brāhman to be a bundle of plants used as a spell for securing growth or fertility. The magic power supposed to reside in these twigs is transferred first to the sacrifice, then to the formula, recitation or song, thus entitling these to be known as brāhman. The word then denotes the creative power in

¹ For the criticism of this theory, Keith - RPVU, II, pp.448-9; 'New Theories as to Brāhman' in Jhā commemoration volume, pp.199-202; Gonda, J. - Notes on Brāhman, pp.3-4.

² Charpentier - Brāhman p.13;
Keith - Jhā comm. vol., p.200.

³ The man in fire is brāhman (agnau puruṣaḥ), one of the definitions of Brāhman in Br.Up-II.1.

⁴ Hillebrandt, A. - ERE, II, pp.797 ff; Festgabe Jacobi, pp.265 ff.

general and develops into Brahman the creative principle.¹ The idea of creative power is derived from the word vardhanam, which is frequently associated with brahman in the Rgveda.

Charpentier tries to fix the original meaning of the word brahman in order to explain its evolution as song or hymn, sacred text and the cosmogenic Brahman - that is the mystic, All-Immanent Primordial Being and the Brāhmans.² He considers the last as a secondary development from brahman the magic power or Brahmanenkraft. The primary sense of the word is taken as Opferstreu, the sacrificial straw (barhis) used by the priests in the ritual.³ He regards brahman and baresman to be phonetically identical and conceptually similar.⁴ According to him the rites performed with the help of this and accompanied by incantations (Zaubersprüche) and conjurations (Beschwörungen) came to be known as brahman rites, and the priests who performed them as the Brāhmans. With the development of the ritual ceremonial the word brahman began to denote magic rites of any kind. The incantations, on

¹ The original sense is taken to be Pflanzenbündel als Wachstums, Fruchtbarkeitszauber; vardhana- that is- Zauber überhaupt, als das ganze Opfer durchdringende mystische Kraft, it develops into alle einzelnen Arten des Zaubers: Spruch, Lied, Gesang and finally Schöpferische Kraft überhaupt, die sich zum Kosmologischen Brahman entwickelt, Hillebrandt - Festgabe Jacobi pp.265ff.

² Charpentier - Brahman, pp.124 ff.

³ According to him brahman in brahmacārin refers to muñja grass used in the girdle of the initiated youth, Brahman, p.76, n.5.

⁴ Charpentier-Brahman, pp.61 ff; cf. Keith-Jhā Comm. vol., p.202.

attaining equal importance with the rite of which they were merely accompaniments in the beginning, were also designated as brāhman.¹ Thus the word, which meant magic (-rite) began to denote magic formula (Zauberspruch or -lied). He interprets brāhman in the Rgveda as magic song or formula and concludes that the meaning developed from plant magic to magic in general, then to magic song or formula. The predominance of magic in Charpentier's view is due to his conviction that all sacrifice in the Rgveda is magic and all prayers are spells.² Charpentier realises that the development of cosmic brāhman from the primary concept of plant magic is not easy to explain.³ He tries to trace it through the occasional use of brāhman as Zauberwesen and also on the analogy of the use of yātu for sorcery⁴ and a class of magical demons.⁵ It is argued that a word which means magic or magic rite can also mean a magician or supernatural magical being.⁶ Though this theory does not involve the reconstruction of the meaning of the relevant verses, the passages cited in support of it⁷ are inconclusive.⁸

¹ Charpentier - brahman, pp.126 ff.

² ibid, pp.83-5; Keith's criticism of these views - Jhā Com.Vol. pp.204-6.

³ ibid. pp.133-7. ⁴ RV - V.12.2; VIII.60.20.

⁵ RV - VII.21.5; VII; X.83.5; VII.104.15-16.

⁶ cf. Narahari, H.G. - Ātman in pre-Upanisadic Literature, pp.35-7.

⁷ Brahman as Zauberwesen-X.61.7; TS-V.4.4.4; Kenopa.III.1 ff.

⁸ Keith - Jhā comm Vol, pp.206.8.

Henning tries to discover the primary meaning of brāhman in the Iranian context but on the linguistic basis.¹ He rejects the brāhman-baresman identification as confusing, compares brāhman with Old Persian brazman and connects it with M.Persian, Parthian and Pahlavi brahm. He assigns to this word the general meanings "appearance, form or style, especially of persons, be it the outward appearance or the style of behaviour". Though Henning suggests that this meaning is also applicable to brāhman, he thinks that the meaning in India was restricted to the ceremonial behaviour and acts of priests at the sacrifice. It was further restricted to the accompanying recitation, which formed part of ritual acts and hence denoted sacred texts.

Dumézil traces brāhman to the Indo-European period and equates it with Roman Flāmen.² The correspondence between the words brāhman and flāmen, that was pointed out by Meyer³ and was supported by important similarities in social and religious ideas, like all other brāhman theories, received support⁴ and also aroused criticism. Objections to the similarity were either based on the ā

¹ Henning, W.B. - 'Brahman' in Transactions of the Philological Society, 1944, London 1945, pp.108 ff. cf. Bailey, H.W. - BSOS, 7, p.403.

² Dumézil, G. - 'Flamen-Brahman', annals du Musee Guimet, 51, 1935.

³ Meyer, L. - Vergl. Gramm. d. griech und latein. Sprache, II. 1865, p.275.

⁴ Kretschmer, P. - Einleitung in die Geschichte der griechischen Sprache, 1896, pp.127 ff; Millet, A - Esquisse d'une histoire de la langue latine, Paris, 1933, p.78; Gonda - NB, chap.I, n.22. cf. Schnader - ERE, II, p.42.

in flāmen¹ or the meaning of the words.² Dumézil realized that the philological objections to the equation may be removed by the establishment of similarity of the concepts in the two cultures. He therefore defines the complete range of ideas conveyed by brāhman-flāmen, their functions and relations in the Indo-European philosophy of life, and hence reconstructs the socio-religious system of a hypothetical primitive nation.³

Impressed by the theory of Frazer about sympathetic nature magic, which is based on the primitive rite of sacrificing the king to reviving life of nature,⁴ he explains the main function of the original brāhman-flāmen as the substitute of the royal victim. The importance and respect which the Brāhmans thus managed to acquire is said to explain their superior social position. The function of Brāhmans as substitutes in the sacrifice of nature magic also helped them to establish their concern with other sacrificial rites, especially with those magic rites which are signified by the neuter brāhman and are in some measure their equivalents, for both are remedies to secure good. Dumézil takes remedy as the central concept

¹ A. Walde and J. Pokorni - Vergl. Wörterbuch d. indogerm. Sprache, II, p. 209.

² O. Schrader and A. Nehring - Reallexikon der Indogerm. Altertums-kunde, II, 1929, p. 200; Charpentier - Brāhman, p. 9.

³ Dumézil - FB.

⁴ Frazer, J. G. The Golden Bough, A Study in magic and Religion, London, 1925

of brāhman in pursuance of his idea that brāhman-flāmen was essentially le Remède, l'homme-Victime. Brāhman, according to him, should therefore be taken to denote modifications of this idea of magic remedy, that is human victim, sacrificial incantation or bundle of grass or anything similar which induces purification and authorises the priest to conduct the sacrifice.¹ He thinks that brāhman, barhis, barha and upabarhana, latin flāmen, Greek pharmakós (scapegoat) and phármakon (remedy) should be derived from the root bhelgh to which he assigns a general religious and magic sense.² Dumézil takes the legend of Śunahśepa as furnishing the evidence for the Brāhmans acting as royal substitutes.³ This is said to be supported by the sacrifice of the primeval Man, from which the Brāhmans are created as superior beings,⁴ by the purusamedha⁵ and Manu's proposed sacrifice of his wife.⁶ Indra's slaying of the Brāhmans, who had advised Manu's evil deed, is taken as further confirmation of the theory.⁷ These instances of

¹ Dumézil ~~in~~ EB, pp.75. ff.

² cf. Keith - Jhā comm. Vol. p.208.

³ AB - VII.13 ff; for criticism, Keith - RPVU, I, pp.262-3;
RV - Brāh. - pp.61 ff.

⁴ RV - X.90.12.

⁵ Keith - RPVU, II, pp.347-8.

⁶ MS - IV. 8.1.

⁷ KS - II.30.

human sacrifice are doubtful,¹ and this elaborate hypothesis² is unnecessary to explain the pre-eminence of the Brāhmans in Vedic society.

Dumézil traces a similar development of the Roman Flāmen from the original substitute of the king to be sacrificed in sympathetic nature magic. He describes the functions of the Flāmen, his peculiar taboos and his relation to other sacred persons, and comes to the conclusion that these fully tally with the functions and taboos of the Brāhman.³ He completely overlooks, while establishing this analogy, the significant fundamental differences between the Brāhman and the Flāmen⁴ and ignores the possibility that the very nature of the functions of priests and sacred persons of different communities tends to their sharing certain common features.⁵

These suggestions cannot be of much help in determining the central concept of the word, as the basis of the original identity of the Brāhman and Flāmen, that is nature magic, the royal victim and his sacred substitute, is difficult to affirm in the Rgvedic period.

¹ Keith - Jhā comm Vol., pp.210-2.

² Dumézil - FB. pp.86-96.

³ ibid, p.58; cf. Dumézil - Mitra-Varuna, Paris, 1948, pp.27-8.

⁴ cf. Keith - Jhā comm Vol., pp.213-4.

⁵ Gonda - NB, pp.6-8.

Keith criticises some of these theories as relying too much on the idea that religion evolves from magic. This view is held responsible for treating prayers as spells and the sacrifice as a magic rite.¹ He admits that religion and magic are combined in the earlier faiths, but he does not take this as sufficient reason to think that one springs from the other or that the Indian mind was devoted to spells to the exclusion of prayer. It is not improbable that both these tendencies, to compel the divine through ritual of magical type and to persuade the gods through prayer, were prevalent among the Vedic priests who cannot be regarded merely as magic workers instigated by the craving for daksinā. It is more than likely that they were aware of the higher elements in man's nature and used the word brāhman for expressing these. The word in the Rgveda should therefore be taken to imply devotion expressed in prayer. The wonders ascribed to brāhman need not suggest spell or incantation as they could easily be attributed to prayer.

Keith traces the different meanings of the word brāhman from this central concept of prayer and devotion. It could be applied to the sacred texts, as it expressed the subjective and the objective sides of the same idea - the feeling and its expression. The priestly mind, prone to regard the means of persuasion or

¹ Keith - Jhā com.Vol, pp.204, 206, 214-5.

compulsion of the gods as the vital element in the universe, applied the same word to express the cosmic essence. Two factors helped the transition of meaning - the importance of the sacred text or spell and the idea of a supernatural universal power,¹ which is discernible in certain hymns in the Rgveda and enunciated more clearly in the Brāhmanas. The application of the term for devotion to the essence of devotion with which the devotee claims to be united is quite plausible in view of the sense of unity with the divine claimed by the mystics. In the Brāhmanas, the word is used in the sense of holy power and came to be applied to the Brāhmanas regarded as the embodiment of this power.²

A review of the words brāhman and ātman in the pre-Upanisadic literature leads Narahari to conclude that their concepts in the Rgveda and the Upanisads are clearly related.³ He discovers some of the Upanisadic notions regarding these terms in certain verses of the Rgveda.⁴ This inference, besides establishing the continuity of philosophical thought, could also solve the difficulty

¹ Oldenberg denies the possibility in the Rgveda of the idea of or a word for a supranormal power concept like the Melanesian mana or orenda of the Hurons, Die Weltanschauung der Brāhmana Texte, pp.49 ff.

² Keith - Jhā comm.Vol., p.207.

³ Narahari - Ātman, pp.3-4, 22-43, 46-9.

⁴ RV - I.164.4; I.73.2; VII.87.2; Narahari - ibid, pp.5-6, 46-7.

in the transition of meaning from the sacred or magic word to the cosmic force. But the verses cited by him mention ātman only, and are not convincing in regard to the brāhman concept.

Renou offers a better suggestion for connecting the meaning of brāhman as 'hymn, formula or continuous recital' in the Rgveda and the 'Universal Principle' indicated in the Atharva-veda.¹ He takes the Rgvedic meaning to be an approximation or phraseological levelling of a more comprehensive and more definite original concept. The primary sense is taken to be a form of activity which manifests itself pre-eminently in the things uttered, but is not restricted to it. He regards brahmodya - the questions and answers bearing on cosmic principles - as an expression of this activity and suggests that brāhman should be taken to denote primarily 'the cosmic charade' in the widest sense of the word. It is then applied to the object of charade - the Brāhman of the Aranyakas and the Upanisads. The word is traced to a root brah-barh signifying 'parler par énigmes'.² The main difficulty of this theory is that brāhman cannot be interpreted as charade in the earlier hymns of the Rgveda.

¹ Renou, L. - 'Sur la notion de brahman' in Journal Asiatique, 237, 1949, pp. 7-46.

² cf. Gonda - NB, pp.57-8; Bosch, F.D.K. - 'An Archeological Approach to the Brāhman Problem' in selected Studies in Indonesian Archeology, pp.175 ff.

The concept of ritual charade suggested by Renou assumes greater importance in the light of ^{ya}satkriyā-vāda introduced by Lüders.¹ It is explained as the peculiar Indian belief that the pronouncement of truth can influence the natural course of events and grant the wish of the person who makes such a statement. This belief is traced to the Rgvedic period and is said to be responsible for the idea that the hymns fortify the gods and strengthen their power. The word brāhman is generally used when such strengthening is mentioned. Brāhman the ritual charade may thus be interpreted as the statement of truth for the success of the sacrifice and the prosperity of the sacrificer.

The idea of the magic potency of truth is worked out by Thieme,² who also suggests that brāhman should be understood as a spiritual or privileged force rather than a commonplace formula. Like Renou, he takes brāhman as an activity, but restricts it to the mental effort between the conception of a thought (dhī) and its enunciation in an adequate form (uktha). He accepts the importance assigned to the pronouncement of truth with the amendment, that to the Indian mind mere utterance of truth does not ensure success, but its solemn declaration in an exalted style

¹ LüdersH- Varuna, ^{Göttingen,} 1951, pp.13-27.

² Thieme, P. - 'Brahman' in ZDMG, 102, 1952, pp.91-129.

or metrical form. He takes brāhman in the Rgveda to mean formulation of truth.¹

Gonda concentrates on finding a central concept which could easily expand to designate the Ultimate Reality.² As he doubts if the most concrete and the most frequent of the Rgvedic meanings of brāhman could also represent its most original sense, he looks for it in the concept of metaphysical Brāhman which is described by Indian thinkers as a basis or a resting place or a foundation of all that exists.³ This notion of Brāhman also infuses the word with the connotation of firmness, support and immovability.⁴ Brāhman as the designation of the basic foundation of the universe is taken to imply strengthening and steadying. The pre-occupation of Indian thinkers with the invisible and intangible Reality behind the phenomenon, that is epitomized in the concept of Brāhman the Absolute, is taken to indicate that 'substratum' should be considered the basic meaning of brāhman. Though Brāhman is treated as the basis of creation in the Atharva-veda and the Brāhmanas, the difficulty of assigning the sense of substratum and the function of steadying or strengthening to brāhman in the Rgveda is solved by

¹ cf. Bosch - ABP, pp.176-7; J.A.B. van Buitenen - 'Akṣara' in JAOS, 79, 1959, p.176.

² Gonda - NB.

³ RV - X.121.1,4; Gonda - NB, p.45.

⁴ cf. Ruben, W. - Die Philosophen der Upanisaden, p.92; Gonda - ibid, p.47. Beane, 1947, 1

making the brāhman concept a logical outcome of the search of Vedic seers for the inherent causality of phenomena.

Gonda believes that the Vedic thinkers, when searching for an adequate word to express the foundation of the universe including the human soul, seem to have selected the word brāhman - a derivative of the root brh to be firm or strong. In order to prove that the sense of foundation is always associated with brāhman, Gonda undertakes an exhaustive study of the conjugational and participial forms of the root brh and its derivatives¹ in the Vedic and the classical literature.² He concludes that the verb denotes throughout 'to make strong or steady', and the derivatives express the quality of firmness, which he explains as the capacity to support.³

As the word brāhman is related to the group of Indo-European nouns which end in - 'men and express power that manifests itself in action or process,⁴ it is applied to power or powerful objects connected with ritual, priests or the gods. It is suggested that in consideration of the deep concern of the Vedic seers for a firm foundation of the universe, the concept of power conveyed by the word brāhman should be understood as that of support or foundation.⁵

¹ brmhita, brmhana, paribrdha, brhat etc.

² Gonda - NE, pp.18-39.

³ ibid. p.38.

⁴ Gonda - ibid., pp.72-3.

⁵ ibid. pp.43-4.

The same strengthening and supporting power is also manifest in Brāhmanaspati and Brhaspati. These personified forms are taken to indicate that together with an impersonal aspect a personal aspect had also prevailed, culminating in the god Brāhman, the figurative head of the later triad.¹

That the masculine brāhman is considered the manifestation of power expressed by the neuter word becomes clear from the Vedic literature, which regards him as brāhman (neuter) or takes him to represent it.² Gonda thinks that brāhman was the general designation of the priests eligible to the special offices of the hotr and others. The latter more restricted use of the word hotr prevailed over the wider term brāhman, which in turn began to be applied to those persons who were considered sacrosanct and powerful, and especially to those who were distinguished for their learning. The steadying power is also implicit in the brāhman priest, who by his mere presence was supposed to exercise a healing and strengthening influence on the sacrifice.³

The strengthening power, ^{according to Gonda,} denoted by the word is stressed in the Rgveda, where brāhman repeatedly appears as vardhanam, something

¹ Gonda - NE, pp.62-9.

² SB - V.1.1.11; V.1.5.2; V.15.4,8.11; PB - XXV.18.4; Gonda - ibid., pp.50-1.

³ ibid., pp.56-7.

that grants prosperity, strengthens or animates. The different meanings thus represent various facets of an idea more general and more comprehensive than sacred word, rite or ritual potency.¹

Various objects designated as brāhman represent or partake of this central idea, which is connected with the function of supporting and strengthening and is termed pratisthā, base or substratum.

In spite of the criticism of Thieme that a number of Gonda's assertions are contestable and untenable,² his main finding that pratisthā represents the basic idea of the word brāhman is not affected. It is confirmed by Bosch, who cites archeological and iconographical evidence to demonstrate that Brāhman as sacred Word was primarily considered the supporting, fortifying and the life-inspiring element.³ Bosch traces the tendency to treat the sacred Word as the foundation of the universe from the Rgveda to Buddhist circles in India and Bali.

The inscribed tablets discovered in 1925 at the base of each of the numerous Stūpas found near Pejeng in South Bali are taken to suggest that the tablets were meant to serve the purpose of

¹ Gonda - NB, p.14.

² cf. Bosch - ABP, p.178.

³ ibid, pp.173-196.

pratisthā or support.¹ It is learnt from the evidence of the Chinese travellers that the practice of depositing objects inscribed with a sūtra at the base of a Stūpa was widespread and of frequent occurrence, and could be traced to the time of Emperor Aśoka.² A similar practice is found in the case of images, whose hollow body or a cavity specially made at the base was filled with inscribed metal plates or slips known as pratisthās or dharmakāyas.³ The supporting function of these inscribed objects is obvious from their position at the base of the Stūpa or the image, and shows that the sacred Word was conceived as the supporting and life-inspiring principle of the universe, which was symbolised by the Stūpa or represented by the image of the god. This idea occurs in the Vāk-sūkta of the Rgveda⁴ and is developed in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, where brāhman is equated with vāc and explained as the threefold knowledge (trayī vidyā). Though created by Prajāpati, it is said to serve as his pratisthā.⁵

Bosch suggests that the close association of the sacred Word and

¹ cf. Bosch - ABP, p.179.

² For Hsüan-Tsang, Beal-Buddhist Records, II, p.146.
for Itsing, Takakusu - A Record of the Buddhist Religion, p.150.
for Fa-hian, Legge - A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms, pp.44 ff.

³ Grünwedel, Mythologie des Buddhismus in Tibet und den Mongolei, p.110

⁴ RV - X.125.

⁵ ŚB - VI.1.1.8.

brāhman in the Vedic literature makes it possible to assign the supporting function of the Word to brāhman. Their close relation is confirmed by the word aksara, which is used for the supreme principle as well as for a syllable, an indication that the two meanings though seemingly apart, are in reality two aspects of the same concept.¹

Bosch attempts a synthesis of many of the current views. He accepts brāhman as the latent power which is manifested as the sacred Word through the ritual. The Vedic altar, regarded by the seers as the womb of the Earth, is supposed to hold the amorphous substance in which primeval powers like brāhman, rta the cosmic order, and pure truth - all identical in essence - are concentrated. The poet-priest activates this substance by means of his poetic genius and intellectual activity and transforms the chaotic amalgam (avyakta brāhman) into magically powerful hymns (vyakta brāhman).² The power of truth unfolded by the hymns enables them to serve as pratisthā to support and strengthen the gods who alight on the altar.³ Bosch thinks that this process also explains the directive power of the brāhman priest. Brāhman

¹ van Buitenen - Aksara, pp.176-187.

² The manifested and unmanifested brāhman, Br.Up. II.3.1; Mait. Up. VI.3.

³ Bosch - ABP, pp.188-190.

gradually emancipates itself from the altar and becomes differentiated into a number of forces. It ultimately emerges as the supreme principle after discarding the bonds of both the altar and the priest. Though it is not possible to suggest a single fundamental meaning suitable for all situations, Bosch suggests that pratisthā may be accepted as its basic function. Power, an attribute or quality implied by brāhman, is not to be mistaken for its meaning.¹ For the development of the meaning of brāhman, Bosch follows Winternitz and traces the evolution from prayer or magic formula to sacred knowledge or the Veda and then to the foundation of all existence, which leads to the idea of Brāhman the creative principle.²

These theories about the significance of brāhman are propounded, supported and criticised by experts on the subject. The discussions point to the lack of agreement among the scholars on the inherent meaning of the word and the development of the concepts connected with it. The difficulty of fixing a basic meaning is not felt to be so great as the problem of tracing its evolution to the metaphysical principle.³ The brāhman concept is

¹ Bosch - ABP, p.195.

² Winternitz - HL, I, p.225.

³ Oldenberg - Gött. Nachr., 1916, p.734.

either found to pass through a series of vague notions, where only a few underterminate features can be distinguished, or the gap between the meaning 'sacred word or prayer' and 'the Absolute' is felt to be insurmountable.¹ These difficulties seem to have made the scholars anxious to discover some force or idea in brahman in its earliest stage that could easily link it to the creative principle.

The idea of interpreting the word in the Rgveda in the light of the Upanisadic notions about it is far from justifiable. Gonda's objection against tracing a semantic evolution also is not valid, as the Vedic thought bears unmistakable signs of change. It is inconceivable that the tremendous changes, which transformed ritual, mythology and reflective thought, had no effect on the meanings or concepts expressed by important words. Besides, the earlier Upanisadic ideas about Brāhman are not very clear or definite. Frequent discussions regarding the real significance of Brāhman indicate that it was interpreted and identified in different ways.² The vagueness of the term and the concepts conveyed by it seems to have been as puzzling then as they are now. It would be better therefore to forget the later implications of the word brahman when fixing its meaning in the Rgveda.

¹ Renou - op.cit, p.7.

² Br.Up, II.1; III.9.10 ff; IV.1; Ch. Up, III.13.8; III.19; Mundakopa, I.1.9.

For a proper understanding of its hymns, it is necessary to keep in mind that the Rgveda is an essentially Indian product in spite of its affinity to the Indo-Aryan and the Indo-European religion and mythology. Thoughts and expressions preserved in the hymns, though basically Aryan or Indo-European, have come a long way in time and space and can hardly be expected to have escaped alterations. An approximately correct interpretation of the hymns would have to take into account the local environment. Comparative mythology and philology may also prove useful if the suggested sense is in accord with the general Vedic scheme. But parallel ideas in the extra-Indic socio-religious and cultural patterns, like the Upanisadic notions, cannot be of much help in view of the possible indigenous influence and regional development. Searching the Āranyakas and the Upanisads or going back to the Iranian or the Indo-European scene to discover the original sense of brāhman has resulted in theories that either stress a particular aspect or can only be sustained by re-interpretation and reconstruction of the same passages.

The word brāhman, whatever its pre-Vedic significance, appears in the Rgveda as a well established term for hymns. The acceptance of hymns or prayer as the basic meaning of brāhman raises the obvious question why this word alone and not dhī, vāc, mantra,

uktha and stoma all of which have a similar significance, acquired the sense of the supreme principle.¹ van Buitenen points out that two of these words later assume similar importance.² Vāc, as the consort of Prajāpati, reaches an eminence comparable to that of brāhman, and dhī - another near synonym of brāhman - identified with buddhi the first product of creation, becomes the highest in the hierarchy of creative principles.³

In an attempt to understand brāhman through the functions of the word aksara, van Buitenen states that the gap between the meaning word or syllable and the name of the first cause is not so wide as one is inclined to think.⁴ He finds that the words aksara and brāhman follow strikingly parallel careers, meeting each other in comparable functions. van Buitenen suggests that the development of the meaning of the word aksara should be followed through the evolution of the concept of 'first cause or source of creation', one of whose names was aksara. Already in the Rgveda, aksara claims the position of a supreme principle without ceasing to mean syllable,⁵ and it lives on in the syllable Om long after it had

¹ Renou - op. cit., pp.7 ff; Thieme - Brāhman, p.101.

² van Buitenen - Akṣara, p.177.

³ The word ahamkāra originally denoting utterance is also shown to have been raised to similar importance, 'Studies in Sāṃkhya (II), Ahamkāra' in JAOS, 77,1957, pp.15 ff.

⁴ Akṣara, p.186.

⁵ Syllable is explained as the measure of metrical utterances and 'is believed to possess an inherent efficacy for these purposes to which it is applied under the proper ritual conditions', van Buitenen-Akṣara p.186; cf. RV - 1.164.24; X.13.3.

come to name the Absolute. The development of the concept of syllable into that of the Absolute is not so much an evolution of meaning as that of function which is linked inseparably with the evolution of creation doctrines. An important aspect of the original functions of aksara the syllable and brāhman the ritually effective utterance is said to be creativeness. Gradually both words come to be viewed so exclusively in their aspect of creativeness, that this aspect and the functions ascribed to brahman by its association with the root brh, are believed to have contributed to the rise of the word brahman to designate the Supreme Reality.

van Buitenen's theory is notable for the indirect method of approach, which avoids much unnecessary discussion regarding the probable original meaning of the word brāhman, and for the suggestion that the development of the word is connected with the evolution of the concept of first cause and the theories of creation. But van Buitenen also, like the earlier scholars, examines the word in a philosophical context. According to him, the belief of the priests in the correspondence of the cosmic and the ritual order invests Word and its manifestation with great significance. He describes how Word manifests itself in the embryonic syllable, which grows into the fully potent brahman through the kindling of Fire. The latter is again thought of as

contained in the syllable, the germ of speech. The birth of inter-dependent Word and Fire is believed to have taken place simultaneously in heaven at the beginning of creation. This cosmic event is reproduced in the sacrificial area, which thus becomes the matrix of cosmic order and the source of brāhman born to beget offspring again.¹

van Buitenen's theory, however, is open to criticism. Although Word is occasionally connected with creation in the Rgveda,² brāhman is associated with aksara and Fire only once in such reflective strain.³ In the qualification prajāvad applied to brāhman in this instance, van Buitenen sees the beginnings of Prajāpati and the creator Brāhmā.⁴ It is difficult to endorse this view, as the same adjective is in another passage again used with brāhman together with other words for material blessings.⁵ It is clear that in this verse brāhman is used in its general sense and has no special implication.

Although van Buitenen finds the development of the words aksara and brāhman similar, there is a significant difference in

¹ RV - VI. 16.35-36.

² RV - III. 55.1; X.90.5.

³ See n.1 above.

⁴ Aksara, p.178, n.13.

⁵ RV - IX.86.41. brahma prajāvad-rayim-aśvapastyam cf. III.8.2. brahma.....suvīram.

their evolution. From the beginning aksara has the specific sense of syllable and a claim, supported by its derivative meaning, to the position of supreme principle. Brāhman, on the other hand, is one of the many words used for hymns in the Rgveda. It is distinguished from its near synonyms, which share its important attributes, mainly by its capacity to express fully the vague or indefinable force ascribed to sacred utterances. It appears comparatively late in reflective speculations on Speech. The association of brāhman with material means of worship like yajña and Soma, and its application for securing all kinds of temporal blessings probably hindered its early appearance in philosophical speculations. The word brāhman was being used without any hint of cosmic significance at a time when the concept of first cause had already developed. Brāhman becomes the designation of the first cause only after other words like purusa, hiranyagarbha, viśvakarman and prajāpati have been tried and found unsatisfactory. It was raised to denote the supreme cause partly because of certain aspects of the original functions ascribed to the word, but also on account of the very usefulness of the word itself and its association with the abstract supernatural power ascribed to sacred utterances.

van Buitenen also limits the connotation of the word brāhman by interpreting it as the ritually effective word. If the

efficacy of brāhman is made to depend on proper ritual conditions, this condition will also apply to other words which denote a hymn and are also believed to be supernaturally effective.¹ Thus the interpretation 'ritually effective' will make it difficult to distinguish brāhman from other words used for hymns. In fact special power and efficacy are ascribed to verbal formulae in all the religious traditions of India. Their efficacy also is believed to depend on proper conditions which vary according to the ascendancy of the ritual, worship or magic. Thus the condition, that they are effective only in a special ritual context applies to all utterances held sacred and not especially to brāhman.

The hymns of the Rgveda give an impression not merely of the importance of the officiants and the sacrifices they conducted, but also of the poets and their compositions addressed to the various gods. Sacrifice forms the basis of religious faith, but hymns are not yet subjugated to it. Though there is no sharp distinction between the poetic and the priestly functions, a majority of the words used for the functionaries denote eloquence and ability to compose rather than skill in conducting the ritual. This is evident from the words used for religious functionaries, that are

¹ See below, pp. 296-7

preserved in the Nighantu. Such words are classified in three groups - those denoting an officiant (rtvij), a man who praises (stotr) and a learned man (medhāvin).¹ Three out of the eight words cited as the synonym of rtvij are not used in this sense,² and two of the remaining terms also denote a reciter or worshipper.³ The importance of composing and chanting is also suggested by the more frequent occurrence of the words that denote a composer or reciter than of the terms which signify an officiating priest.⁴ Apparently all the hymns compiled in the Rgveda were not originally meant to accompany the sacrificial performance.⁵ This indicates that, in the beginning, the importance of the hymns did not depend on their use in the sacrifice.

Speculations about the creation and the idea of establishing correspondence between the cosmic and the ritual order make the hymns subsidiary to ritual. Doubts begin to be entertained whether the verse could accomplish anything for a man who is ignorant of the significance of the syllable (aksara) in the supreme heaven

¹ Nigh. III.18,16,15.

² bharat, kuru, and marut.

³ vāghat and sabādhas.

⁴ cf. the frequent references to ancient vipras, ṛsis or jaritṛs, in the hymns of the Rgveda.

⁵ See above p. 53.

(parame vyoman).¹ This may be a reminder to the priests that they should not forget the supernatural origin of the hymns or a warning against using them mechanically. Hymns are often described as fashioned carefully and sincerely.² In spite of the growing importance of the sacrifice, hymns continue to be considered competent to win the favour of the gods and secure wordly gains.³ Importance of sacred speech lives on in the reflections on vāc and leads to advanced speculations on Om.⁴

In order to form an idea of the meaning and functions conveyed by the word brahman, it is essential to examine it in relation to the importance and significance generally attached to the sacred Word in the Rgveda. The comparison of brahman with other words used for hymns shows that the attributes and functions assigned to it are not extraordinary. The words arka and gir, like brāhman, denote the agent noun.⁵ The qualification divine⁶ or urged by the

¹ RV - I.164.39, all subsequent unspecified references are from the RV.

² I.61.2; I.67.2; X.119.5.

³ I.48.14; I.61.3; I.96.2; I.114.1,9,11; I.130.10; I.175.6; VI.21.5; VII.18.1; X.66.14. cf. AV - VI.2.1; XII.1.38.

⁴ Ch.Up - I.1.1; Praśnopa - V; Mundakopa - II.2,5,6, etc.

⁵ Grassmann - WR.

⁶ dhī - VII.34.9; manīṣā - VII.34.1; susṭuti - IV.43.1.

gods¹ is applied to other words for hymns in the same way as brāhman.² Brāhman³ as well as hymns denoted by other words are described as fashioned like a chariot.⁴ Similar use of brāhman and some of its near synonyms clearly shows that the ideas expressed by them were taken to be alike.⁵ Strengthening and magic potency, generally regarded as the special features of the concept conveyed by brāhman, are also associated with other words for hymns. Uktha,⁶ stoma⁷ and gir⁸ are described as strengthening, and the magical achievements ascribed to brāhman are also comparable to those of arka,⁹ dhīti,¹⁰ vacas¹¹ and mantra.¹²

The word brāhman is nearest in importance and efficacy to the term mantra,¹³ which appears late and is not of frequent occurrence

¹ II.3.8; IV.11.3; VI.62.3; VIII.12.14; X.139.5.

² VI.15.4; VII.36.9; VIII.89/100.10,11.

³ IV.16.20; V.73.10.

⁴ I.61.4; III.54.17; VII.7.6; X.39.14.

⁵ cf. brahmavāhas, ukthavāhas and girvāhas etc.

⁶ I.10.5; VIII.14.11.

⁷ I.5.8; III.32.13; V.22.4; VIII.6.1.

⁸ III.53.1; VI.44.13; X.4.7; cf. Manman-VIII.44.12; vacas-I.114.6.

⁹ I.88.4. ¹⁰ IV.36.4.

¹¹ IV.16.6; VI.39.2; VI.44.8.

¹² I.67.3; VII.76.4. ¹³ III.53.8; X.14.4.

in the Rgveda. As brāhman acquires a wider sense, including sacred texts, and the supernatural power of the hymns, the word mantra seems to take its place as the designation of hymns. In the Rgveda the word brāhman is next to gir in the frequency of occurrence, and is closely followed by dhī. The words stoma and uktha are also used quite frequently. Most of the words for hymns are etymologically connected with roots involving ideas of praise,¹ worship,² intellect³ and speech.⁴ Brāhman is an exception in this respect, as it does not yield to regular derivation.⁵ This uncertainty of derivation seemed to have proved a definite advantage as brāhman, free from etymological limitations on its meaning, could easily be applied to the different aspects and functions of poetic activity. The use of brāhman and of the words formed from it also supports the inference that though similar to other words of its class in general attributes, it was regarded by the seers as the most adequate and appropriate of them all to convey the indescribable force of sacred words.

In the Rgveda, the neuter form occurs almost two hundred times,

¹ stoma, stuti, stotra, praśasti, etc.

² arka.

³ mati, manīṣā, dhī, dhīti, mantra, etc.

⁴ vacas, vāc, gir, etc.

⁵ Unādi - IV.145; The root bṛh should give barhman, cf. Charpentier - Brahman, p.3.

and the masculine fifty. The term brāhmana accented on the first syllable occurs three times, and accented on the last it is found twelve times. Compound words including the element brahman occur about seventy times. The neuter form and the words related to it are mostly found in the earlier books. The former generally signifies hymns, which also appears to be the earlier meaning. The use of the masculine brahman, though less numerous than the neuter form, is about the same in both strata, but the terms formed from it and the word brāhmana are mostly found in the later books. Though the use of the neuter brahman in the sense of the Vedas and the power especially ascribed to the Brāhmans continues, the word brāhmana and the terms related to it begin to be used more frequently in the later literature.

The association of brahman with the root brh is implicit in the interpretations of the Indians.¹ Yāska ignores the meanings of food and wealth implied by the inclusion of brahman among their synonyms,² and interprets it once as rites (karman).³ While commenting on a verse from the Rgveda,⁴ Yāska points out that it refers to the functions of the different priests but explains the

¹ cf. Gonda - NB, pp.18 ff.

² Nigh, II.7,10; some of the words included are the means of securing these, like vacas for food and kṣatra for wealth.

³ Nir - XII.34.

⁴ X.71.11.

masculine brāhman occurring in it as a learned man and not as an officiant. He is described as one who knows everything, and his superiority is ascribed to learning (śruta), with an additional remark that brāhman (neuter) presumably the Vedas, are superior to all.¹

Sāyana adopts the word parivṛdha² used by Yāska in this connection, and applies it as a qualification to the meanings he assigns to the neuter brāhman, that is hymns,³ food,⁴ oblation,⁵ and ritual acts (karman)⁶. The meaning stotra is occasionally qualified as mantra,⁷ veda⁸ or sāman,⁹ food and oblation are not clearly distinguished,¹⁰ and karman is explained as rites¹¹ or hymns.¹² The influence of the later significance of the word is evident in his explanation of the neuter form as the Brāhman class¹³ and the creative principle.¹⁴ Sāyana does not appear to consider hymns, sacred food or ritual acts as very distinct, for he often suggests these as alternative meanings.

¹ Nir - I.8. brahmā.sarva-vidyāḥ. sarvaṃ veditum arhati. brahmā parivṛdhaḥ śrutataḥ. brahma parivṛdhaṃ sarvataḥ.

² IX.97.34.

³ I.24.11; VII.61.2,6; VII.66.11, etc.

⁴ VIII.3.9; IX.86.41 etc. ⁵ VIII.4.2. etc.

⁶ VII.72.3. etc. ⁷ I.61.16; VI.75.19.

⁸ I.3.5. ⁹ VI.47.14; VIII.89.3.

¹⁰ cf. AV - IV.35.6. ¹¹ VII.60.11; VIII.62.4.

¹² I.105.15; VIII.69.9; IX.86.41 etc.

¹³ VI.52.3; VII.13.3; VIII.5.13; VIII.35.16; VIII.37.1; X.122.2.

¹⁴ III.29.15; X.114.8.

A striking feature of the word brāhman in the Rgveda is its overwhelming association with the god Indra. It is quite natural that Indra - the liberal defender of his protégés - should feature frequently in the supplications for wealth, victory or protection. The epithets stomya,¹ ukthya² and girvanas³ applied to him, indicate that the seers considered him especially worthy of praise.⁴ But the association of brāhman with Indra is exceptional, as almost half the references to the word occur in the hymns addressed to Indra alone or jointly with other gods. Though the word brāhman is also connected with other gods, there is considerable difference in the number of references. Brahman is found nineteen times in the hymns to Agni and fifteen times in those to the Aśvins, in comparison to the ninety-seven references to it in the hymns addressed to Indra.

This special association of brāhman and Indra⁵ may be ascribed to their common functions of protection⁶ and strengthening. The word brāhman occurs in connection with requests for security and

¹ VIII.16.8; VIII.24.19; X.96.6.

² I.17.5; III.51.1.

³ VI.50.6; VIII.79/90.3.

⁴ The epithet puruṣtuta is mostly applied to Indra, I.11.4; I.57.4; III.37.4; V.34.1; VIII.15.1.

⁵ cf. VIII.32.17 brahmā krnota panya it.

⁶ VIII.79/90.1 - Indra is to be invoked in every fight; for brahman - see below, pp. 293-4.

wealth.¹ Brāhman is offered² and raised³ to Indra, to whom it is said to rush like streams flowing down a slope.⁴ As brāhman and Soma are found to be equally acceptable⁵ to Indra, he is frequently invited to come for it.⁶ The strengthening potency of brāhman, though associated with other gods,⁷ is more frequently described in connection with Indra. Brāhman is repeatedly asserted as strengthening to Indra⁸ and is also said to have made him great.⁹ The seers seem to think that Indra himself enables brāhman to become strengthening for him,¹⁰ and that he demonstrates his power through it.¹¹ But brāhman also appears to be in need of strengthening, as Indra is said to stimulate it.¹² Indra and Soma are once asked to urge the brāhman as the kings do.¹³ The encouragement of hymns by

¹ III.53.12; V.42.4; VI.17.13; X.30.11, etc.

² III.51.6; VI.50.6; VII.31.11.

³ I.80.9; VIII.58/69.9; X.22.7.

⁴ I.52.7; VI.47.14; VIII.87/98.8. ⁵ I.165.4; X.104.6.

⁶ I.3.5,6; II.18.7; VIII.4.2. etc.

⁷ The Aśvins and Agni, see below, pp. 290, 292; Uṣas - I.124.13.

⁸ II.12.14; V.31.10; VI.23.5; VII.22.7; VIII.1.3; Indra is also strengthened by stoma and uktha, VIII.14.11.

⁹ X.50.4.

¹⁰ VI.23.6; X.49.1.

¹¹ II.17.3; III.51.12.

¹² I.10.4; II.20.5; VIII.36.7.

¹³ VII.104.6, imā brahmāṇi nrpatīva jinvatam.

the chiefs in the form of their patronage and liberality is implicit in this comparison. The simile also suggests the dependance of hymnology upon the goodwill of the rulers and explains the close relation between brāhman the hymn and Indra the bounteous chief of the gods.

Indra is praised for protecting the brāhman of the rsis.¹ References to the revilers of hymns (brahma-dvis) indicate that brāhman was really in need of protection. The men hostile to brāhman² are called wicked³ and expected to bear the sins of the worshippers.⁴ Indra, Brhaspati and Soma are requested to aim their weapons at those who hate the hymns.⁵ As the prayer-haters seem to prosper in spite of the requests to deprive them of their possessions,⁶ the gods are asked to turn against them the elements of nature.⁷ Though the seers seem confident that Indra will not wait for their entreaties to kill the revilers of prayer-songs,⁸ they appear anxious that Indra should not listen to their opponents.⁹ This also shows that those who hated the hymns could also appeal to Indra. That brāhman was especially pleasing to Indra¹⁰

¹ VII.28.2

² VI.52.2.

³ VII.104.2.

⁴ X.36.9.

⁵ III.30.17; VI.52.3; VIII.53/64.1; X.182.3.

⁶ V.42.9.

⁷ VI.22.8; VI.52.2.

⁸ X.160.4.

⁹ VIII.45.23.

¹⁰ I.83.2.

is also suggested by the exclusive use of the epithet brahmavāhas (one to whom prayers are offered) for him.¹ Similarly the epithet brahmayuj (harnessed by brahman) is applied only to the horses of Indra.² The importance of brahman for harnessing Indra's horses seem to be stressed in the verse, where the horses already qualified as brahmayuj are said to be yoked by brahman.³ It is therefore appropriate that brahman should be considered the best gift for Indra.⁴

The meaning and functions conveyed by the word brāhman may also be gathered from the references to it in connection with Agni. Brāhman is uttered,⁵ made⁶ or fashioned⁷ for Agni and is spoken by Agni.⁸ It strengthens Agni⁹ and is stimulated by him.¹⁰ Brahman is purified¹¹ and impelled on its way by Agni.¹² The man who urges brahman can win the favour of Agni.¹³ It seems that a man could

¹ I.101.9; III.41.3; V.34.1; V.39.5; VI.21.6; VI.45.4, cf. SV - II.582; VI.45.7,19; Indra is also qualified as ukthavāhas VI.59.10; VIII.85/96.11; X.104.2; cf. gīrvāhas for the same deity I.61.4.

² I.177.2; VIII.1.24; VIII.2.27; VIII.17.2; cf. vacoyuj used for the same, I.20.2; VI.20.9; VI.45.39; V.33.3, abrahmatā is used in connection with Indra's horses.

³ III.35.4; cf. I.82.6; I.84.3.

⁴ I.61.1, Indrāya brahmāni rātata mā. Sāyana atīśayena dattāni. Geldner - Als bestes Geschenk, Der RV, I, p.77.

⁵ I.75.2; cf. X.50.6. ⁶ IV.6.11.

⁷ X.80.7.

⁸ II.5.3; cf. IX.97.34, by Soma as vahni. cf. I.105.15, Varuṇa is said to make it.

⁹ I.31.18; I.93.6; X.47. ¹⁰ VII.1.20; X.141.6; cf. X.66.12.

¹¹ IX.67.23.

¹² VII.13.3; X.122.2.

¹³ IV.4.6.

outstrip his fellow beings by means of brahman in the same way as by a horse.¹ The seers appear eager to assure Agni that the brahmans they offer are composed to the best of their ability and knowledge.² In a late hymn of the Rgveda, brahman is associated with the magical efficacy which is ascribed to it in the Atharvaveda. Agni is requested to destroy by brahman the evil spirits that are believed to haunt women.³

The Áśvins as protectors and rescuers seem also to have inspired the composition of brahman.⁴ The brahman offered to them is described as kindred⁵ to them and longing for them. It is one of the glorious things that they receive.⁶ They are requested to listen to the brahman of the rsis, which they have heard before.⁷ The kārus offer brahman to the Áśvins at dawn,⁸ as do Vasistha⁹ and the Kanvas¹⁰ in the course of the sacrifice. A descendant of Atri

¹ II.2.10.

² I.31.18; III.13.3.

³ X.162.1,2; cf. I.162.17, for the healing power of brahman.

⁴ I.117.25; II.39.8.

⁵ jāmi brahmāni, VII.72.3,4.

⁶ I.117.10.

⁷ VII.70.4.

⁸ VII.72.4, cf. I.165.14; cf. A singer offers it to the Maṛuts.

⁹ VII.70.6.

¹⁰ I.47.2.

claims to have made, like chariots, strengthening and pleasing brāhman for the Ásvins.¹ The same seer, probably impatient at their delayed response, asks the Ásvins whose brāhman they have preferred.² The Ásvins, strengthened by brāhman are said to have restored Viśpalāā.³

In the Rgveda, brāhman (neuter) is once associated with ksatra and viś in a hymn which is addressed to the Ásvins and consists of self-contained groups of three verses each.⁴ The Ásvins are invited to drink Soma with other gods and to shower all kinds of blessings, keeping their minds in accord with the goddess Dawn and the Sun. The phrase sajósasā Usāsā sūryena ca occurs as a refrain in every verse with an additional clause which is common to each triplet, but varies from group to group. In one of the groups the general request, which is repeated in all the three verses, is to drive away disease and to destroy the demons. The Ásvins are asked in particular to impel brāhman (neuter) and dhī,⁵ to urge ksatra and men and to encourage the viś and the cows.⁶ This triplet is slightly different from the rest of the hymn which mentions the usual things for which the seers

¹ v.73.10.

² v.74.3; cf. I.165.2. Maruts asked a similar question.

³ I.117.11; Viśpalāā, on losing a leg in a battle was given an iron leg by the Ásvins, I.116.15 etc.

⁴ VIII.35.

⁵ v.16, Geldner - Geistlichkeit, Der RV, II, p.349; Sāyana-
Brāhmaṇam.

⁶ v.17,18.

normally pray. The words applied to the three classes and the main characteristics later associated with them, are here grouped together for the first time. It is uncertain whether the words brāhman and ksatra are used for the classes known as such or whether they denote the special power which later becomes the distinctive feature of those classes. In either case, class affiliations seem to be implicit in these verses.

Brāhman and ksatra are also associated in another Ásvin hymn, where the former implies hymn and the latter apparently denotes physical strength. The Ásvins are requested by the sage Dīrghataṃas to sprinkle the ksatra with clarified butter and honey, and to urge on the brāhman in war.¹ Brāhman and ksatra are here connected with the same men, who are implied by nah and who hope to win booty. The Ásvins are also believed to bestow ksatra on the man who is sincere in offering oblations or gifts to them.² It is thus obvious that in this hymn these words are used in their general meanings.

Some of the references to neuter brahman suggest that it was considered especially efficacious for protecting the seers and their patrons in war. A seer asks Indra for the protection of

¹ I.157.2.

² 1.157.6.

his brahman, so that it may prove helpful in hostile encounters.¹
 Dīrghatamas also prays for the success of his brahman in battles.²
 When requested to protect his worshippers from the wicked, Agni is
 addressed as brahmanaskavi,³ which appears to be similar in
 significance to Brahmanaspati, often invoked for help and protection.⁴
 It is asserted that Indra saved Sudās in the battle of ten kings by
 the help of the brahman of the Vasisthas.⁵ In the same hymn, a
 patron is assured that he is safe from every injury as the axle of
 his chariot has been fixed by the brahman of Vaiṣṭha's ancestors.⁶
Brahman is also regarded as the real armour for the warrior or seer.
 In a hymn devoted to the glorification of the weapons and the
 chariot to be used in war,⁷ the blessings of Soma and Varuna are
 invoked for the king when he puts on the armour.⁸ But the seer
 seems to realize that the real protection will be provided by
brahman only. As he is confident that the gods will destroy those
 who wish to harm him, he proclaims brahman - probably for its

¹ I.129.4. asmākaṃ brahma ūtayevā prtsuṣu kāsucid cf. VI. 17.13.

² I.152.7. ³ VI.16.30.

⁴ I.18.3-5; II.23.5, etc. ⁵ VII.33.3; cf. VII.83.4.

⁶ VII.33.4.

⁷ VI.75.16, arrow is also referred to as sharpened by brahman;
 cf. AV - III.19.8; VS - XVII.45.

⁸ VI.75.18.

efficacy to protect and secure the help of the gods - to be the internal shield.¹

The adjectives used with brahman indicate that the seers regarded it as worth hearing,² having deep sense,³ incomparable,⁴ illustrious⁵ and undecaying.⁶ It is also referred to as new⁷ and ancient,⁸ a gift from the gods⁹ and dear to them.¹⁰

The ideas of the Rgvedic poets may also be gathered from the functions assigned to it. In addition to its main functions of protection¹¹ and strengthening,¹² it is said to attract the gods to the sacrifice¹³ and helps to secure their favour,¹⁴ wealth,¹⁵ and children.¹⁶

¹ v.19, brahma varma mamāntaram.

² I.165.11; cf. VIII.52/63.2, Śamsya.

³ V.85.1. ⁴ VII.43.1; X.89.3.

⁵ III.29.15. ⁶ III.8.2.

⁷ IV.16.21; V.29.15; VI.17.13; VI.50.6; VII.35.14; VII.55/66.11;

⁸ VII.33.4; VIII.52/Val.4.9; X.13.1.

⁹ I.37.4; VII.33.11; VII.36.1; VII.97.3; VIII.32.27.

¹⁰ V.42.2; V.85.1. ¹¹ See above, p. 294

¹² See above, p. 288. ¹³ I.3.5-6; II.18.7, etc.

¹⁴ I.113.19; II.2.7; VII.24.4, etc.

¹⁵ III.53.13; X.30.11.

¹⁶ III.8.2; VI.16.16; IX.86.41.

The supernatural achievements of brahman, though generally taken to stress its magical aspect, appear from the relevant references to be the outcome of a number of factors of which brahman is one. When Atri claims to discover the Sun by a special brahman, it becomes clear from the verse that he gives as much importance to the help received from Indra and his own handling of brahman as to its power.¹ Similarly Indra is said to help brahman (neuter) to find the cows by loosening the rocks.² When the Gotamas are described as raising the lid of the well to drink water, they do so with the help of brahman and arka.³ As similar feats are ascribed to other designations of hymns, these achievements of brahman appear to be characteristic of sacred words in general. Dhītis are said to have helped the Rbhus to produce a cow from the skin of a dead one,⁴ and Sāmans are described as making the Sun shine.⁵ Agni is said to make the Heaven firm by true mantras,⁶ and the sages are supposed to have split a mountain by vacas.⁷

¹ V.40.6; cf. V.2.6, Atri's brahman is said to rescue Agni.

² X.112.8.

³ I.88.4; cf. VI.65.5; for arka see above, pp. 282-3.

⁴ IV.36.4. ⁵ VIII.29.10.

⁶ I.67.3. ⁷ IV. 16.6; cf. VI.39.2.

It is thus clear that the qualities and functions ascribed to brahman, in the Rgveda, are also associated with other words for hymns. The attributes of brahman thus appear to be related to the importance and efficacy attached to sacred utterances by the Rgvedic seers, and do not seem to support the identification of brahman with magical or spiritual force.

It is therefore reasonable to infer that brahman in the Rgveda primarily denotes hymns,¹ a sense also assigned to it by many scholars.² That hymn is the inherent meaning of brahman is also supported by its use with words denoting composers and reciters³ and with verbs that imply singing,⁴ speaking,⁵ listening⁶ and worshipping.⁷ In many instances brahman apparently refers to the hymn in which it occurs in the concluding⁸ or the penultimate stanza.⁹ Brahman in the plural is often used to denote

¹ Charpentier rejects 'hymn as the original meaning, Brahman, pp.5 ff., 72; and accepts it as a later sense, ibid., p.127.

² Deussen, P. - Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie, Leipzig, 1920-22, pp.90, 139, 146, 240, etc. cf. Müller - Six Systems of Philosophy, p.53 ff.; Winternitz - HL, I, p.248; Edgerton, F. - JAOS, 1929, p.116.

³ I.177.5; I.165.14; VII.28.2; X.89.16.

⁴ I.37.4; VIII.32.27. ⁵ I.75.2; II.5.3.

⁶ VI.69.4; VII.83.4; VIII.17.2; cf. VII.70.5.

⁷ I.24.11; III.18.3; V.85.1, etc.

⁸ I.31; II.37; III.51; IV.6; V.29, etc.

⁹ II.16; III.29; IV.3, etc.

the hymns collectively.¹ The frequent use of the word brāhman in the singular with the qualifying pronoun in the plural indicates that the singular form of the word was also regarded as plural in sense and was taken to denote the hymns in general.²

The verb kr, frequently used with the word brāhman, implies its performance and thus gives the impression that the word denoted a rite and not a hymn. Charpentier is thus led to suggest that the most suitable meaning in these instances is magic rite (Zaubertrittus),³ which he also takes to be the most common meaning of the word in the Rgveda.⁴ Though the latter assumption is not supported by the references to brāhman in the Rgveda, it is possible that it was also used for some minor rite or detail of a sacrifice. But the meaning of the verb kr or its frequent occurrence with the word brāhman is not sufficient in itself to justify its interpretation as 'magic rite'.⁵ It is obvious that making means composing when vāc⁶ and stoma,⁷

¹ V.73.10; VI.69.4; VII.1.20, etc.

² II.39.8; II.41.18, cf. yā manma in this verse; III.41.3; VI.35.1; X.66.12, etc.

³ Brahman, p.122.

⁴ cf. Gonda - NB, p.41.

⁵ Though Sāyana also interprets brāhman as rite or act, he does not explain it as such in many verses where it occurs with kr.

⁶ VII.34.9; X.66.14.

⁷ I.114.9.

neither of which denotes a rite, are described as done. Brahman therefore should be interpreted as rite only when its primary sense hymn does not suit the context. The more appropriate meaning of the word brāhman can be ascertained by the adjectives applied to it,¹ by the similar use of other words for hymns² and by the context itself.³ There can be no doubt about the brāhmans said to be made by the Gotamas, as these are also referred to as spoken.⁴ Brāhman qualified as new should be taken in its general sense,⁵ as it normally denotes hymns when referred to as new.⁶ The brāhman mentioned as made by the gods is more likely to refer to a hymn than a rite,⁷ for the brāhman connected with divine agency in other verses definitely denotes a hymn.⁸

When the passages where brāhman can be easily explained as hymn are thus eliminated, a few verses will be left where the meaning rite is found suitable. One such verse occurs in the hymn, which

¹ I.165.11, brutyam brahma cakra.

² IV.16.20, brahmākarma bhṛgavo na ratham; X.39.14, stomam --- akarmātakṣāma bhṛgavo na ratham.

³ III.41.3; VII.22.3,7, etc.

⁴ I.63.9.

⁵ VII.35.14.

⁶ VI.50.6; cf. VI.17.13.

⁷ I.105.15.

⁸ I.37.4; VII.97.3.

identifies the Brāhmans with frogs.¹ The Brāhmans, after remaining inactive for one year in pursuance of some vow, are said to have composed hymns (vācamakrata), while performing brahman lasting for a year.² Brahman here is used in a ritual setting and seems to refer to the Atirātra sacrifice mentioned in the previous verse.³

It is difficult to infer which particular rite is denoted by the word brahman when it is referred to as performed in a ritual context. Such references generally occur either in connection with the morning sacrifice or with the savanas.⁴ The association of brahman with the former may be attributed to the ritual of kindling the sacrificial fire accompanied by the simultaneous recitation of hymns.⁵ The association of brahman with the savanas may be due to the belief that Soma fails to delight Indra, if it is not accompanied by brahman (neuter).⁶ In both cases brahman appears to have been used for the rite, in which greater importance was attached

¹ VII.103.

² VII.103.8.

³ Sāyaṇa takes brahman as referring to gavāmayana, a sacrificial session associated with the Atirātra.

⁴ I.47.2; IV.6.11; VII.70.6; VII.72.4; II.16.7; II.34.6; IX.67.24; IX.77.3.

⁵ van Buitenen - Akṣara, p.178, n.12

⁶ VII.26.1.

to the recitation of hymns.

The use of words formed by the combination of brahman and kr, confirms the suggestion that performance of brahman generally meant its composition.¹ The word brahmakṛti is used in connection with arcat (one who praises), and appears to imply the hymns composed by him.² Brahmakāra is used as an adjective for those who praise and recite, and thus seems to refer to the composers of hymns.³

The numerous derivatives of brahman and the compounds of which it forms a part indicate the importance of the word and also help to ascertain the various aspects of the concept conveyed by it. The use of these words shows that the basic notion of brāhman in the Rgveda, is related to verbal formulae and their attributes.

The idea expressed by abrahman⁴ is comparable to that of anukṛta⁵ and anṛc⁶ and implies lack of faith in Vedic hymns and verbal formulae.

¹ brahmakṛt, III.32.2; VII.9.5; X.50.7, etc; that making means composing is also clear from Sāyana's explanation of VI.17.3,13, asmābhiḥ kṛtaṃ stotram.

² VII.28.5; cf. VII.29.2.

³ VI.29.4.

⁴ IV.16.9, abrahmā dasyu; X.105.8; cf. subrahman, VII.16.2; X.47.3;

⁵ V.2.3.

⁶ X.105.8.

Modification in the primary concept denoted by brāhman may be noticed in the meaning of brahmī,¹ which denotes the idea of devotion and implies faith in Vedic ritual. Brahmanyat, the participle form, occurs in the earlier books of the Rgveda, generally as an adjective for men who are said to be favoured and protected by Indra.² The use of the word nūtana with brahmanyat for a follower of Indra is significant, as he is also the god in whose greatness doubts are expressed by the Vedic seers.³ The worshippers of Indra are described as ancient (pratna), more recent (madhyama) and contemporary (nūtana),⁴ probably to establish the continuity of his worship. The later followers of Indra are expected to learn of his past glories by enquiring about him.⁵

The meaning of brahmanyā is not very clear by itself as it occurs once only.⁶ That it denoted some mental quality, associated with hymn-making and the vipras, may be inferred by comparing it with the word subrahmanya. The meaning of the latter is clear from the hymn which describes the achievements of the Angirases. The

¹ IX.33.5.

² II.19.1,8; IV.24.2, etc.

³ II.20.4; VI.21.8.

⁴ VI.21.5.

⁵ VI.21.6.

⁶ VIII.6.33; Sāyana explains it as hymns or oblations and Geldner translates it as 'im Streben nach einer erbaulichen Rede';
Der RV, II.297.

hope is expressed that they may secure long life, prosperity, good progeny and subrahmanya.¹ The Angirases are closely associated with the tradition of chanting and composing hymns, and are also qualified as vipras and brahman. The word may be taken to mean devotion to sacred learning or skill in composing hymns.

These words confirm the close association of brahman with various aspects of hymns and their composition, that is the expression of the feelings essential for the worship of the gods through sacrifice. The neuter brahman may therefore be taken as connected with all kinds of religious and magical activities from the minor rites to major sacrifices, as well as with the composition and recitation of hymns.

As a result of the general tendency to attribute efficacy to the different words for hymns, brahman came to be invested with functions and attributes expressive of the power of sacred Words. This led to its association and identification with vāc. An idea of the special force of brahman may be gathered from the verse which states that the full significance of brahman was known to the ancient sages.²

The association of brahman with religious and intellectual

¹ X.62.4, cf. Geldner 'Tüchtigkeit im heiligen Worte', Der RV, III, 232.

² III.29.15, Geldner - 'verstehen die Erstgeborenen des heiligen Wortes alles', Der RV, I, 363.

pursuits is also pointed out by the statement that it is one of the three vāc, which Soma is said to have impelled.¹ A significant reference to the association of vāc and brahman occurs in a mystic hymn, which tries to establish the fundamental unity of the gods.² The hymn also glorifies prayer under its different names. The greatness of vāc, which in other hymns is said to comprise the whole creation,³ is here measured through brahman. Vāc is described as spreading as far as the brahman extends.⁴ The later cosmological notion of brahman is not applicable here, as the same verse describes uktha being in a thousand places and pervading Heaven and Earth. The verse is thus clearly a eulogy of hymns.

This may be taken as a turning point in the development of the idea expressed by brahman. It brings out the force of hymns which are representative of religious activities generally, and combines it with the force of speech. In association with the latter, brahman becomes an object of philosophical speculation.

¹ IX.97.34, tisro vāco īrayati brahmano manīṣām, 'den Gedanken der heiligen Rede', Geldner - Der RV, III, 99.

² X.114. ³ X.71; X.125.

⁴ X.114.8, yāvad brahma viṣṭhitam tāvatī vāk; cf. I.164.35. brahmāyam vācaḥ paramam vyoma; TS - VII. 3.1.4; ŚB - VI.1.1.8; vāc is identified with the three vedas; Br.Up - IV.2, brahman is vāc.

The word brahman is replaced gradually by the word mantra, which begins to be used for sacred hymns. The neuter brahman continues to be used for denoting the special power of knowledge and learning of the Vedas, which was associated with the Brāhmaṇs.

As the primary meaning of the masculine brahman is related to that of the neuter, this survey of the different aspects of the latter should help to form some idea of the basic concept conveyed by the former. Brahman would thus appear to denote the poet who composed or recited brahman (neuter). Like the neuter brahman, which, though similar to its synonyms in its attributes and functions, expressed an additional notion of a special efficacy and force, the masculine brahman also seems to resemble and yet differ from the other words for priest-poets by denoting one who knows and wields this power of the sacred word.

The use of the masculine brahman is similar to that of the other terms for poets, except in the frequency of its occurrence. More than half of the references to brahman occur in the first, eighth and the tenth books. Like the terms vipra and rsi, brahman is also applied to the gods Indra,¹ Soma² the Maruts³ and Agni.⁴ The application of brahman to Agni may be due to the priestly functions ascribed to them both. The most unmistakable references to brahman

¹ VI.45.7; VIII.16.7; X.28.11.

² IX.96.6.

³ V.29.3; X.77.1.

⁴ II.1.3; VII.7.5.

as a priest occur in connection with Agni.¹ In addition to his priestly duties,² brahman is also associated with the expounding of knowledge.³ Though the duties of the brahman priest are not laid down clearly in the Rgveda, their passive nature seems to be implied, when Indra is asked not to be lazy like a brahman.⁴ Brahman is also associated with the recitation of hymns.⁵ A brahman in his rapture from drinking Soma is said to compose a hymn strengthening to Indra.⁶ The brahmans are also said to have strengthened Indra by prayers to help him in killing Ahi.⁷ The brahman for whom Indra finds the cows⁸ may be one of the Angirases, who are qualified as brahman in another verse⁹ and are generally associated with Indra in his exploit of recovering the lost cows.¹⁰ Brahmans also help Indra to subdue a dasyu.¹¹ Like the vipra and rsi, a brahman is also distinguished from a ruling chief when Indra and Agni are said to take delight in the house of a brahman or a

¹ II.1.2; IV.9.4; X.52.2; X.91.10.

² I.10.1. ³ X.71.11.

⁴ VIII.81/92.30.

⁵ II.12.6; II.39.1; V.31.4; X.107.6; X.117.7.

⁶ I.80.1, cf. verses 9,16.

⁷ V.31.4; cf. VIII.66/77. 5, Indra also strengthens brahmans.

⁸ I.101.5; ⁹ VII.42.1.

¹⁰ see above, p.145 n.1 ; cf. VIII.85/96.5.

¹¹ I.33.9.

king.¹ Brahmans are associated with Soma² and qualified as those who press its juice.³ In an interesting reference brahman is mentioned as wishing for a prospective Soma sacrificer in the same way as a healer looks for his patient.⁴

Application of the word brahman to the same individuals who are qualified as rsi or vipras shows that the former expressed some additional religious or intellectual quality.⁵ There is a significant reference which confirms the close association of brahman with hymns and foreshadows the later idea of a Brāhman and his sacrifice being necessary for the sanctity of the land. Soma is requested to flow in the country where that brahman is honoured, who performs Soma sacrifice and chants metrical prayer (chamdasyām vācam vadan).⁶ Another reference also shows that the later image of the brahman was beginning to take shape. The seer hopes that the man who does not feed the brahman would suffer.⁷

Except in these later references the word brahman cannot be taken to refer to the priest of this name or to a member of the

¹ I.108.7.

² VIII.32.15; VIII.85/96.5.

³ VIII.17.3.

⁴ IX.112.1.

⁵ V.32.17; VIII.16.7; X.107.6; X.122.5.

⁶ IX.113.6.

⁷ X.28.11; for gifts to the brahman in its later sense, VIII.45.39; X.85.29.

Brāhman class. The use of brahman indicates its similarity with other words for poet-priests and clearly shows that brahman was regarded as composer and reciter of hymns and was believed to embody the power of sacred utterance and knowledge. The same idea forms the basis of the notion of brāhman priest,¹ who is a silent supervisor of the sacrificial performance and is expected to remedy the mistakes that may be committed by other priests in the course of the sacrifice. In spite of the magical aspect of his function, it seems to have been believed in some priestly circles that the brahman priest could avert by the power of his knowledge of the Vedas, the evil arising from the shortcomings in the sacrifice. This is evident from the remark that the brāhman priest heals the sacrifice by his knowledge of the three Vedas.²

The eminence of a Brāhman or Brāhmaṇa would also appear to be based on the power believed to be inherent in the sacred Word and its knowledge. Thus knowledge in general and that of the Vedas in particular seems to have been the basic characteristic of the Brāhmans. This basic concept implied by the masculine brahman or brāhmana is never entirely lost sight of. In spite of the growing

¹ AB - III.2, brahmán is said to be full of brāhman; ApŚS - III.20.7.

² AB - V.34; KB-VI.10-12, trayyā vidyayā bhisajyati; ŚB - I.5.I.12; AAr - III.2.3. cf. Bloomfield - Hymns of the AV, p.LXIII.

insistence that birth alone could make a Brāhman, the necessity of Vedic learning for real Brahmanhood is stressed from time to time.¹ When Janaka is said to have become a Brahman, the word apparently refers to his superior knowledge and not to his caste affiliation.²

The use of the word brāhmana to denote the cup of the brahman priest for drinking Soma, shows that the word was used to mean relating to brahman or 'connected with brahman'. This sense is also implied by the word when it is used for the books, which contain explanations of brahman the hymn or brahman the sacrifice.³ The use of the word brāhmana in the Rgveda is rare. Seven references out of twelve are in the tenth book. In the earlier books the Vasisthas only use this word. Most of the references to brāhmana are in connection with learning,⁴ speech and the function of healing.⁵

The word does not appear to denote a class in any of the references, unless we remember its later implication.⁶ The only

¹ Manu - II.28.

² ŚB - XI.6.2.10.

³ ŚB - III.2.1.39-40, identifies brahman with sacrifice.

⁴ I.164.45; VII.103.1,7,8; VIII.57/Vā1.10.1; X.71.8,9.

⁵ X.97.22.

⁶ The earlier significance is remembered in later literature, cf. ŚB - V.I.I.II, brahma hi brāhmaṇaḥ.

reference where it definitely denotes a class is in a late hymn.¹

Not much importance can be attached to the verse mentioning the wife of the Brāhmaṇa, as the hymn is obscure and full of mystical references which centre round the word brahmajāyā.² The meaning of the hymn does not bear any relation to the wife of a Brāhmaṇ but can only be understood in a mystical context. A comparison with the same hymn reproduced in the Atharva-veda confirms this supposition.³ The redactor poet-priest seems to have realised the unsatisfactory nature of the present hymn for supporting the claims of the Brāhmans. He has therefore added eleven stanzas which have nothing in common with the main hymn except the words brah^maj^āyā and brāhmanajāyā.

All these examples prove that the basic meaning of the neuter brahman is hymn. Gradually it was modified to mean the mystical power of the hymn, and the intellectual power. The latter referred to the agent who was believed to represent or personify this power.

These two trends in the interpretation of the word brahman developed on independent lines culminating on the one hand to mean

¹ X.90.12.

² X.109.4. The word brahmajāyā occurs four times in this hymn, which also has the only reference to brahmacārī in the RV.

³ AV - V.17.

the Supreme Being of the Upanisads and on the other in the detailed notion of Brāhman who was closely associated with the sacrificial rights and who embodied the power and the learning of the Vedas.

It is out of the scope of this thesis to discuss the metaphysical value of the term brahman, though it may be noted in passing that the philosophical thought differentiated between its original meaning identified with the Vedas and known as the lower brahman in contrast to Brahman the idea of the Supreme Reality.

Surveying this period one notices how gradually the masculine usage of the term brahman, denoting an agent is replaced by brāhmana, also a masculine term denoting both sacred texts and a functional group entitled to practice sacred duties. Among the main contributory causes is the fact that in this era emphasis was shifting to the neuter notion of brahman entailing the philosophical concept of Supreme Reality, and the concept of the efficacy of hymns and prayer. This led to a strong currency of the word brāhmana. This change was supported by the loss of distinction in the accent of the earlier form brahman, which had formerly clearly defined the boundaries of application.

Conclusion

This study is an attempt to survey the notion of Vedic priesthood as it evolved and led to the formation of the Brāhman class. We have traced this concept back to the pre-Vedic period in order to arrive at a plausible explanation of the priesthood in Vedic society.

Contemporary research on this subject tends to limit its enquiry to the Vedic period, imposing notions of class structure derived from the Smṛti literature. Thereby scholars have reconstructed an image of Brahmanism not necessarily inherent in the Vedic society. We feel it to be a more stimulating approach to reassess the concepts of Brahmanism by linking pre-Vedic evidence with that of the Vedic period. Our findings, we feel, provide a more consistent view of the evolution of the Brāhman than do those currently popular among students of the subject.

When considering pre-Vedic evidence we have to rely largely on archeological findings. In the earliest period society could be classified in two distinctive streams - an indigenous and an Aryan, each with its own independent notions of priesthood. The indigenous religious concepts, in as far as they can be inferred, tend to be affiliated with some of those in the post-Vedic Hinduism, whereas the Aryan concepts are nearer to Indo-European and Indo-Iranian attitudes towards divinity and sacrifice. Nevertheless both streams

shared certain similarities, especially on a popular level, which seem to have facilitated their fusion in the Vedic times. When we consider the Rgvedic period we notice that there is a threefold class structure and a system of organized priesthood with complex functions. Though priesthood was substantially a hereditary calling it was not exclusively so. In this context it is important to realize that, contrary to general assumptions, the priesthood at this stage was dominantly functional and had not yet become a closed order.

Our etymological study of some keywords in the Rgveda, such as vīpra, ṛsi, puróhita and bráhmaṇ clearly supports the thesis that Brahmanism evolved gradually from functional notions of sacerdocy. A study of these keywords also shows how fluid the concept of the priesthood was and how it came to mean a closed order in later Vedic literature.

We find that the word vipra is used in the Rgveda as a functional designation. The fact that it is used not only as a substantative but also as an adjective in contexts of eloquence or excellence of speech, excludes the possibility of its denoting a specific caste. The derivative meaning of the word also suggests the idea of poetic excellence or the expression of intellectual exaltation. In addition to the functions of composing and reciting hymns and participating in the savanas, the vipras are also

associated with the function of healing and with ascetic practices of some kind. The use of the word, in the later Samhitās, to denote a member of the Brāhman class shows that the Vedic priesthood was forming into a more restricted order.

The word rsi also cannot be taken as indicative of any particular caste. Though the derivative meaning of this word is a composer of hymns, its usage in the Rgveda suggests that it implied a man of greater mental discernment than an ordinary poet. The rsis assume a semi-divine status in the later strata of the Rgveda, and gradually begin to be regarded as the seers of the Vedic hymns and the exponents of Vedic religion and culture. The idealization of the concept denoted by the word rsi appears to have been completed, when the rsis begin to be treated as equal to the gods. In spite of the growing importance of the notion of rsi in the ritual circles and the general belief in their being the progenitors of the Brāhman families, the Vedic literature clearly shows that heredity was not an essential factor in becoming a rsi. Thus the analysis of the word rsi also proves our point that the early Vedic priesthood was not entirely hereditary.

Our study of the word purohita shows that it came to be applied to the domestic priest in general and the king's chaplain in particular on account of the qualities of guidance, protection and competence implicit in the concept conveyed by it. The

purohitas appear to have exploited the importance of their office, and the opportunity provided by the process of cultural interaction and the subsequent transformation of the Vedic ritual and conceptual system, to assume the role of guides and guardians of the kings. But the purohita does not appear to have enjoyed much importance in the orthodox ritual circles. Though he tried to achieve eminence by subtle devices, he does not seem to have succeeded in dominating his patron in the Vedic period.

The word brahman denotes in the Rgveda verbal formulations - prayers or charms - believed to possess a special efficacy. Gradually the word came to be applied to the collections of such formulae, the Vedas. From this point the meaning of this word had a twofold development. The mystic tendency of Vedic thought and the efforts of the sages to discover the ultimate cause and foundation of the universe raised vāc or speech to become one of the many objects of their reflections. Brahman as sacred utterance, on account of its association with vāc and the sense of indescribable and incomprehensible power that it implied, is included in these discussions. Gradually it replaces other words used by the sages to name the Supreme Being. The obscurity of its derivation and the idea of power inherent in it seems to have made brahman the most appropriate word to designate the Supreme Reality.

The association of brahman with vāc in the later strata of the

Rgveda raised it to be the object of the highest philosophical speculations and also connected it with knowledge and its power. Vedic priests appear to have realised very early the importance of knowledge and its value for securing ascendancy and dominance over their fellow beings. Besides this, knowledge of some kind especially of the verbal formulae, was considered essential for all priestly functions.

Unlike vipra, rsi or purohita the word brāhmaṇa, a derivative of brahman, was thus more comprehensive and capable of denoting every type of priestly activity. The idea conveyed by the word also included the notion of the power of liturgy. The Brāhmaṇs seem to have set about perfecting their public image as the preservers of the Vedic literature, as indifferent to material needs, and above all as dispensers of Vedic ideas and culture. A judicious mixture of shrewdness and cunning, learning and sagacity, enabled them to exercise their sense of superiority over other groups of society.

In our study we agree with the generally accepted view of Brahmanism from the Smṛtis onwards, when it became a more restricted closed order. But it would be misleading to confine the notion of Indian priesthood to its more recent connotations without referring to the archetypes formulated in the Vedic times. We hope to have established this link by using a semantic approach.

BIBLIOGRAPHY1. Sanskrit TextsSamhitās

Atharva-veda

With the commentary of Sāyana ed. §
S.Pandurang Pandit, 4 vols,
Bombay, 1895-98

Tr. into English in parts by
M. Bloomfield, SBE 42, Oxford, 1897

Śaunakīya Śākhā ed. C.R. Lanman,
tr. with exegetical notes by D.W. Whitney,
2 vols., HOS 7-8, Cambridge, Mass., 1905

Vrātya-kāṇḍa tr. into Hindi with
Sanskrit commentary by Sampurnanand,
Banaras, 1912

Tr. into English by R.T.H. Griffith,
2 vols, Banaras, 1916-17

Paippalāda Śākhā ed. Raghu Vira, 3 vols,
Lahore, 1936-41

ed. S.D. Sātavalekar, 3rd ed.,
Surat, 1957

Śaunakīya Śākhā With the commentary of Sāyana
ed. Viśvabandhu and others 4 pts.,
Hoshiarpur, 1960-62

Rgveda

With the commentary of Sāyana,
ed. F. Max Müller, 6 vols.,
London, 1849-74

In The Samhitā and the Padapāṭha,
ed. F. Max Müller, 2 vols.,
London, 1877

Tr. into English in parts by
F. Max Müller, 2 vols., SBE 32, 46,
London 1891, 1897

Tr. into English by R.T.H. Griffith,
2 vols., 2nd ed., Banaras, 1896

Rgveda Textkritische und exegetische
Noten, von H. Oldenberg,
2 vols, ~~Leide~~, Berlin, 1909-12

Tr. into English by H.H. Wilson,
vol.4-6 ed. E.B. Cowell and W.E. Webster,
6 vols., reprint, Poona, 1925-28

With the commentary of Skandasvāmī
ed. C.Kunhan Raja, 1st. Aṣṭaka,
Madras, 1935

With the commentary of Mādhava
ed. Lakshman Sarup, 4 vols.,
Lahore, 1939

With the commentaries of Mādhava and
Bharatasvāmī, ed. C.Kunhan Raja,
Madras, 1941

Tr. into German as 'Der Rigveda' by
K.F. Geldner, 4 vols., HOS 33-36,
Cambridge, Mass. 1951

Tr. into Hindi by Ramgovind Trivedi,
Allahabad, 1954

With the available commentaries of
Udgītha and Skandasvāmī,
ed. Viśvabandhu and others pts 1-6,
Hoshiarpur, 1963-65

Sāmaveda

Die Hymnen des Sāmaveda, ed. T.Benfey,
Leipzig, 1848

Tr. into English by R.T.H. Griffith,
Banaras, 1907

ed. C.Kunham Raja, Madras, 1941

ed. S.D. Satavalekar, 3rd ed.,
Bombay, 1956

Yajurveda

Kāṇva Saṃhitā
(white YV)

With the commentary of Sāyana
ed. Madhava Shastri, Banaras, 1915

ed. S.D. Sātavalekar, Aundh, 1941

Kaṣṭhala-Kaṭha Saṃhitā
(Black YV)

ed. Raghu Vira, Lahore, 1932

Kāthaka Saṃhitā
(Black YV)

ed. L. von Schroeder, 3 vols.,
Leipzig, 1909-1922

ed. S.D. Satavalekar, Aundh, 1943

Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā
(Black YV)

ed. L. von Schröder, 4 pts. in one vol.,
Leipzig, 1923

ed. S.D. Satavalekar, Aundh, 1942

Taittirīya Saṃhitā
(Black YV)

With the commentary of Mādhava,
ed. E. Roer, E.B. Cowell and others,
6 vols., Calcutta, 1860-99

ed. A. Weber, Indische Studien,
vol.11-12, Leipzig, 1871-72

With the commentary of Sāyana,
ed. Kashinatha Shastri Agase, 9 vols.,
Poona, 1900-1908

Tr. into English by A.B. Keith, 2 vols.,
HOS 18-19, Cambridge, Mass., 1914

ed. Ananta Shastri Dhupkar,
Aundh, 1945

Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā
(White YV)

With the commentaries of Uvata and
Mahīdhara ed. Vasudev L. Pansikar,
Bombay, 1912

Tr. into English by R.T.H. Griffith,
Banaras, 1927

ed. S.D. Satavalekar, Aundh, 1946

Brāhmaṇas

Aitareya Brāhmaṇa

ed. and tr. into English by
M. Haug, 2 vols., Bombay, 1863

in one vol., Sacred Books of the Hindus,
Allahabad, 1922

ed. T. Aufrecht as 'Das Aitareya Brāhmaṇa',
Bonn, 1879

With the commentary of Sāyana,
ed. S.Śamaśrami, 4 vols.,
Calcutta, 1894-1906

With the commentary of Sāyana,
ed. S. Agase, 2 vols., Poona, 1896

- Gopatha Brāhmaṇa
ed. R. Mitra and Harachandra
Vidyabhūṣana, Calcutta, 1872
ed. D. Gaastra, Leiden, 1919
- Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa
(Talavakāra Brāhmaṇa)
Text and tr. into German by W. Caland
as 'Das Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa in Auswahl',
Amsterdam, 1919
ed. Raghuvira, bk. 1,
ed. Lokesh Chandra, II, 1-80,
Lahore, Nagpur, 1937
- Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa
ed. Rama Deva from the edition by
H. Oertel in JAOS, 16, 1894, pp. 79-260,
Lahore, 1921
- Kauṣitaki Brāhmaṇa
ed. and tr. into German by B. Lindern,
Jena, 1887.
ed. G.V. Chhaya, ASS 65, Poona, 1911
- Pañcavimśa Brahmana
(Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa)
With the commentary of Sāyana,
ed. A. Vedantavagisha, 2 vols.,
Calcutta, 1870-74
Tr. by W. Caland, Calcutta, 1931
With the commentary of Sāyana,
ed. A. Chinnasvami Shastri,
Banaras, 1935-36
- Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
Mādhyandina recension,
Tr. into English by J. Eggeling,
5 vols., SBE 12, 26, 41, 43-44,
Oxford 1892-1900
Kānvīya recension, ed. W. Caland,
vol. 1, Lahore, 1926
Mādhyā recension, ed. A. Chinnasvami Shastri
2 vols., Banaras, 1937
- Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa
With the commentary of Sāyana,
ed. R.L. Mitra, 3 vols., Calcutta, 1859
With the commentary of Bhattabhāskara
mīśra, ed. A. Mahadeva Shastri, pts 1-4,
Mysore, 1908

Rigveda Brāhmaṇas:
Aitareya and Kauṣītaki
Brāhmaṇas

Tr. by A.B. Keith, HOS 25,
Cambridge, Mass. 1920

Aranyakas and Upaniṣads

Aitareya Āraṇyaka

With the commentary of Sāyaṇa,
ed. R. Mitra, Calcutta, 1876

ed. A.B. Keith (Introduction,
translation and notes) Oxford, 1909

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad

With the commentary of Śaṅkarācārya
tr. by Swami Madhavananda, 3rd ed.,
Almora, 1950

Chāndogya Upaniṣad

With the commentary of Śaṅkarācārya
ed. K.S. Agase, ASS 14, 3rd ed.,
Poona 1902

With the commentary of Śaṅkarācārya tr. into
English by Ganganatha Jha,
Introduction and index by Umesha Mishra,
Poona, 1942

Daśopaniṣad

ed. S.S. Marulkar
(Aitareya, Chāndogya, Bṛhadāraṇyaka,
Īśa, Kena, Kaṭha, Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkya,
Praśna), Poona, 1937

Eighteen Principal Upaniṣads

ed. V.P. Limaye and R.D. Vadekar,
Poona, 1958

The Principal Upaniṣads

ed. S. Radhakrishnan
(Introduction, text, translation, notes),
London, 1953

Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads

tr. into English by R.E. Hume,
2nd revised edition, London, 1931

Taittirīya Āraṇyaka

With the commentary of Sāyaṇa,
ed. R. Mitra, Calcutta, 1872

With the commentary of Sāyaṇa,
ed. B.S. Phadke, 2nd ed., 2 vols.,
Poona, 1926-27

Sūtras

- Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra With the commentary of Haradatta Miśra,
ed. A. Chinnasvami Shastri,
Banaras, 1932
ed. G. Bühler, 2nd ed., Poona, 1932
- Āpastamba Gr̥hya Sūtra ed. M. Winternitz, Vienna, 1887
With commentaries,
ed. A. Chinnasvami Shastri,
Banaras, 1928
- Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra With the commentary of Rudradatta,
ed. R. Garbe, 3 vols., Calcutta, 1881-1903
Calcutta, 1881-1903
tr. by W. Caland as 'Das Śrauta Sūtra des
Āpastamba', 3 vols.,
Göttingen - Leipzig - Amsterdam, 1921-28
With commentaries,
vol I, ed. Narasimhachar;
vol II, ed. T.T. Srinivāḍagopalacarya,
Mysore, 1944, 1953
- Āśvalāyana Gr̥hya Sūtra With the commentary of Haradattācārya,
ed. T. Ganapati Shastri,
Trivendrum, 1923
ed. Purushottam Shastri, ASS 105,
Poona, 1937
- Āśvalāyana Śrauta Sūtra ed. Ganesh Shastri Gokhale, ASS 81,
Poona 1917
With the commentary of Siddhāntin,
ed. Mangola Deva Shastri,
Banaras, 1938
- Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra ed. E. Hultzsch, 2nd revised ed.,
Leipzig, 1922
ed. A. Chinnasvami Shastri,
Banaras, 1934
- Baudhāyana-Śrauta-Sūtra ed. W. Caland, 3 vols, Calcutta, 1904-24

- Gautama-Dharma-Sūtra ed. A.F. Stenzler, London, 1876
With the commentary of Maskarin,
ed. L. Srinivasacharya, Mysore, 1917
- Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra With the commentary of Karka,
ed. N.P. Parvatiya reprint,
Banaras, 1928
ed. Vidyadhara Sharma, Banaras, 1933
- Lātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra With the commentary of Agnisvāmī,
ed. A. Vedantavagisha, Calcutta, 1872
With commentary, ed. M.J. Bakshi,
ending with Agniṣṭoma chap.,
Banaras, 1932
- Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra ed. A. Hillebrandt, 4 vols., 1889-99
Tr. into English by W. Caland,
ed. Dr. Lokesh Chandra, Nagpur, 1953
- Gr̥hya Sūtras Tr. by H. Oldenberg, p.1,
Śāṅkhāyana Āśvalāyana, Pāraskara,
Khādīra, SBE 29, Oxford, 1886
Pt. II, Gobhila Hiranyakeśin
Āpastamba, SBE 30, Oxford, 1892
- The Sacred Laws of the Aryas The Dharma Sūtras tr. by G. Buhler,
Pt. I, Āpastamba and Gaṇṭama, SBE 2,
Oxford, 1879
Pt. II, Vasiṣṭha and Baudhāyana, SBE 14,
Oxford, 1882
- Smṛtis and Purāṇas
- Bhāgavata Purāṇa ed. Vāsudeva L. Panasikar, 2nd ed.,
Bombay, 1905
- Manu Smṛti ed. V.N. Mandlik, Bombay, 1886
Tr. into English by G. Buhler, SBE 25,
Oxford, 1886
With the commentary of Kullūka Bhaṭṭa,
ed. Vasudeva L. Panasikar, 6th edition,
Bombay, 1920

Matsya Purāṇa

ed. Jivananda Vidyasagara,
Calcutta, 1876

ed. under the direction of H.N. Apte,
ASS 54, Poona, 1907

Parāśara Smṛti

Tr. into English by K.K. Bhattacharya,
Calcutta, 1887

ed. Chandrakanta Tarkalamkara, 3 vols.,
Calcutta, 1889

Viṣṇu Purāṇa

Tr. into English by H.H. Wilson, with an
introduction by R.C. Hazra, 3rd ed.,
Calcutta, 1961

With the commentary of Śrīdhara Svāmī,
ed. Jivananda Vidyasagara, Calcutta, 1882

Text with Hindi tr. by Manilal Gupta,
3rd ed., Gorokhpur, 1952

Yājñavalkya Smṛti

With the commentary of Aparārka,
2 vols., ASS 46, Poona, 1903-1904

With the commentaries of Mitramiśra and
Vijñanesvara, ed. N.S. Khiste and
J.S. Harsinga, Banaras, 1924

Miscellaneous

Amarakoṣa or
Nāmāliṅganuśasana of
Amarasinha

With the commentary of Bhaṭṭa
Kṣīrasvāmī, ed. A.D. Sharma and
N.G. Sardesai, Poona, 1941

ed. Narayana Rama Acharya, 6th ed.,
Bombay, 1944

Arthaśāstra of Kaṭṭilya

ed. R. Shama Sastry, 1st ed.,
Mysore, 1924

ed. T. Ganapati Śāstri, 3 vols.,
Trivandrum, 1924-25

Tr. by R. Shama Sastry, 3rd ed.,
Mysore, 1929

Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini

ed. S. Chandrashekhara Sastrigal
Trichinopoly, 1912

Sūtrapāṭha and pariśiṣṭas with word index,
compiled by S. Pathak and S. Chitrao,
Poona, 1935

Br̥had Devatā of Śaunaka

ed. and tr. by A.A. Macdonell,
2 vols., HOS 5-6,
Cambridge, Mass., 1904

Br̥hat Saṃhitā of Varāhamihira

With the commentary of Bhatta Utpala,
ed. Sudhakara Dvivedi, 2 vols.,
Banaras, 1895, 1897

Kathā-sarit-sāgara of
Somadeva

Tr. into English by C.H. Tawney, 2 vols.,
Calcutta, 1880-84

ed. Durgaprasad and Kashinath P. Parab,
4th ed., revised by Wasudeva
L. Pansikar, Bombay 1930

Mahābharata

Tr. into English, Manmath Nath Dutt,
Calcutta, 1895-97, 1903

critical ed. V.S. Sukthankar and others,
Poona, 1933-58

Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali

ed. F. Kielhorn, 3 vols.,
Bombay, 1892-1909

Nirukta

ed. H.M. Bhadkamkar,
Bombay, 1918-1921

ed. and tr. by Lakshman Sarup,
Lahore, 1927

Ramāyaṇa of Vālmiki

ed. Kashinath Pandurang Parab, 2 vols.,
Bombay, 1888

With three commentaries,
ed. S.K. Madholkar, 7 vols.,
Bombay, 1912-20

Pāli Text

The Jātakas

ed. E.B. Cowell, and tr. by various hands,
7 vols., Cambridge, 1895-1913

2. Reference books

- Bloomfield, M. A Vedic Concordance, HOS 10, Cambridge, Mass., 1906
- Böhtlingk, O. & Roth, R. Sankrit Wörterbuch, 7 vols., St. Petersburg, Leipzig, 1852-75
- Dandekar, R.N. Vedic Bibliography, vol. I, Bombay, 1946
vol.II, Poona, 1961
- Grassmann, H. Wörterbuch zum Rig-veda, Leipzig, 1873
- Hastings, J. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 13 vols., Edinburgh, 1908-1926
- Macdonell, A.A. A Vedic Grammar for Students, 1st ed. 1916, reprint Bombay, Calcutta, Madras 1958
- Macdonell, A.A. and Keith, A.B. Vedic Index of Names and Subjects, 2 vols., London, 1912
- Hindi Translation by Ram Kumar Rai, 2 vols., Varanasi, 1962
- Monier-Williams, M. A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, new ed., Oxford, 1960
- Pokorny, J. Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch, Bern, 1948
- Renau, L. Bibliographie Védique, Paris, 1931
- Shastri, Suryakanta A Grammatical Dictionary of Sanskrit (Vedic) vol.1, Delhi, 1953
- Shastri, Vishvabandhu ed. Caturveda - Vaiyākaraṇa - Padasūcī, or A Grammatical Word Index to the four Vedas, Hoshiarpur, 1963
- Shastri, Vishvavandhu, ed. Vaidika - padānukrama-kośa, or A Vedic Vaidika Word Concordance, Samhitās, 1 vol., Lahore, 1942
Samhitās, 2 vols., Hoshiarpur, 1955-56
Brāhmaṇas, 2 vols., Lahore, 1935-36
Upaniṣads, 2 vols., Lahore, 1945
Vedāngas, 2 vols., Hoshiarpur, 1958
- Wackernagel, J. Altindische Grammatik, general introduction by L. Renou, vol. 1, 2i, ii, 3, Nachträge von A. Delbrunner, Göttingen, 1957

3. General Books

- Agrawala, V.S. India as known to Pāṇini, Lucknow, 1953
 Sparks from the Vedic Fire: A New Approach
 to Vedic Symbolism, Varanasi, 1962
- Altekar, A.S. State and Government in Ancient India,
 (From earliest times to circa 1200 A.D.)
 Banaras, 1949
 Sources of Hindu Dharma: in its socio-
 religious aspects, Sholapur, 1952
- Apte, V.M. Were Castes formulated in the R̥gveda?
 BDCRI, II, 1940-41, pp.34 ff.
 Social and Religious Life in the Gṛhyasūtras,
 Bombay, 1954
- Arnold, E.V. Vedic Metre in its Historical Development,
 Cambridge, 1905
- Baines, A. Ethnography, Strassburg, 1912
- Banerjea, A.C. Studies in the Brāhmanas
 Delhi: Varanasi: Patna, 1963
- Barth, A. The Religions of India,
 tr. by Rev. J. Wood, popular edition,
 London, 1914
- Basham, A.L. The Wonder That Was India, London, 1954
- Beni Prasad The State in Ancient India, Allahabad, 1928
- Bergaigne, A. La Religion Védique d'après les Hymnes
 du Rigveda, 3 vols., Paris, 1878-1883
- Bhagvat, R.R. A Chapter from the Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa of the
 Sāmaveda and the Lāṭyāyana Sūtra, on the
 admission of the non-Aryans into Aryan
 Society in Vedic Age,
 JBBRAS, 19, 1895-97, pp.357 ff.
- Bhandarkar, D.R. Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture,
 Madras, 1940

- Ghurye, G.S. Caste and Class in India, 2nd ed.,
(first published as 'Caste and Race in
India', 1932), Bombay, 1957
- Gonda, J. Notes on Brahman Utrecht, 1950
Purohita, in Studia Indologica,
Festschrift für Willibald Kirfel,
pp.107 ff Bonn, 1955
Epithets in the Rgveda
'S-Gravenhage, 1959
- Gordon, D.H. The Prehistoric Background of Indian
Culture, Bombay, 1958
- Hauer, J.W. Die Anfänge der Yogapraxis,
Stuttgart, 1922
Der Vrātya, Untersuchungen über die
nichtbrahmanische Religion Altindiens,
Stuttgart, 1927
- Haug, M. Brahma und die Brahmanen, Vortrag.
Akad. d. Wissen,
München, 1871, pp.5 ff
- Henning, W.B. Brahman in Transactions of the
Philological Society, 1944,
London, 1945, pp.108 ff
- Hertel, J. Das Brahman, in Indog. Forschungen,
41, pp.185 ff
Die Arische Feuerlehre, vol.I,
Leipzig, 1925
- Hillebrandt, A. Vedische Mythologie, 2nd ed., 2 vols.,
Breslau, 1927, 1929
- Hopkins, E.W. The Social and Military Position of the
Ruling Caste in Ancient India as
represented by the Sanskrit Epic,
JAOS 13, 1889, pp.57 ff
Problematic Passages in the Rigveda,
JAOS, 15, 1893, pp.252 ff
*Numerical Formulae in the Veda and
their bearing on the Vedic Criticism,
JAOS, 16, 1896, pp. 275 ff.*

- Hutton, J.H. Caste in India: Its Nature, Function and Origins, 4th ed., London, 1963
- Jacobi, H. Über das Alter der Rgveda in Festgräss an Rudolph von Roth, Stuttgart, 1893, pp.68 ff
Die Entwicklung der Gottesidee bei den Indern, Bonn, Leipzig, 1923
- Kaegi, A. The Rigveda ... authorised translation with additions to the notes by R. Arrowsmith, Boston, 1886
- Kane, P.V. History of Dharma-Śāstra, vol.,II, pt.I, Poona, 1941
- Karambelkar, V.W. The Atharvavedic Civilization, its place in the Indo-Aryan Culture, Nagpur, 1959
- Karandikar Hindu Exogamy, Bombay, 1929
- Karve, Iravati Hindu Society, an Interpretation, Poona, 1961
- Keith, A.B. The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads, 2 vols., HOS 31,32, Cambridge, Mass. 1925
New Theories as to Brahman, in Jha Commemoration Volume, pp.199 ff., Poona, 1937
A History of Sanskrit Literature, reprint, Oxford, 1961
- Ketkar, S.V. The History of Caste in India, vol. I, An Essay on Hinduism, its Formation and Future, vol. II, Ithaca, N.Y., 1909
- Kosambi, D.D. Early Stages of Caste System in Northern India, JBBRAS, NS, 22, 1946, pp.32 ff
Early Brahmins and Brahmanism, ibid, NS, 23, 1947, pp.39 ff
On the Origin of the Brahmin Gotras, ibid., NS, 26, 1950, pp.21 ff
Introduction to the Study of Indian History, Bombay, 1956

- Lal, B.B. Excavations at Hastinapur and other explorations in the Upper Ganga and Sutley Basins; AI, No.10-11, 1954-55, pp.5 ff
- Landtman, G. The Origin of the Inequality of the Social Classes, London, 1938
- Lassen, C. Indische Alterthums^ukunde, 4 vols., Leipzig, London, 1858-1874
- Leach, E.R. ed. Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan, Cambridge, 1960
- Lueders, H. Varuṇa. Aus dem Nachlass herausgegeben von Ludwig Alsdorf, Vol.1-2 Göttingen, 1951
- Macdonell, A.A. A History of Sanskrit Literature London, 1928
Vedic Mythology, Strassburg, 1897
- Mackay, E.J.H. The Indus Civilization, 2nd ed. revised and enlarged by Dorothy Mackay, London, 1948
- Majumdar, R.C. ed. The Vedic Age, History and Culture of the Indian People, vol. I, London, 1951
⁴
Pusalkar, A.D.
- Malinowsky, B. The Dynamics of Culture Change, ed. with an Introduction, Phyllis M. Kaberry, New Haven, London, 1946
- Manikar, T.G. Mysticism in the R̥gveda, Bombay, 1961
- Marshall, J. and others Mohen^ujodaro and the Indus Civilization, 3 vols., London, 1931
- Mehta, R.N. Pre-Buddhist India, Bombay, 1939
- Muir, J. Original Sanskrit Texts, on the Origin and History of the People of India, their Religion and Institutions, 5 vols., 2nd ed., London, 1872-74
On the Relations of the Priests to the other classes of Indian Society in the Vedic Age, JRAS, NS, 2, 1866, pp.257 ff

- Müller, F. Max A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature so far as it illustrates the primitive religion of the Brahmans, London, 1859
Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as illustrated by the Religions of India (Hibbert Lectures), London, 1880
Natural Religion, The Gifford Lectures, London, 1898
The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy, new ed., London, 1903
- Nair, Balkrishna N. The Dynamic Brahmin: A Brahmino-centric Analysis of Indian Culture, Bombay, 1959
- Narahari, H. G. Ātman in pre-Upaniṣadic Vedic Literature, Adyar (Madras), 1944
- Oldenberg, H. Zur Geschichte des indischen Kastenwesens in ZDMG., 51, pt. 2, 1897
Zur Religion und Mythologie des Veda, Nachr. Gött. Ges. d. Wiss. 1915
Zur Geschichte des Wortes brahman, ibid., 1916
Die Religion des Veda, Zweite Auflage, Stuttgart, Berlin, 1917
Vorwissenschaftliche Wissenschaft. Die Weltanschauung der Brāhmaṇa-Texte, Göttingen, 1919
- Pargiter, F. E. Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, London, 1922
- Piggott, S. Prehistoric India to 1000 B.C. London, 1962
- Pischel, R. and Geldner, K. F. Vedische Studien, 3 vols., Stuttgart, 1889-1901
- Pisṣani, V. 'On Horse Stables in Vedic Times' in ABORI, 39, 1958, pp. 133 ff
- Raja, C. Kunhan Poet-philosophers of the Ṛgveda, Vedic and pre-Vedic, Madras, 1963

- Ram Gopal India of the Vedic Kalpasūtras,
Delhi, 1959
- Rapson, E.J. ed. The Cambridge History of India,
vol.I, Cambridge, 1922
- Rau, W. Staat und Gesellschaft im Alten Indien,
Wiesbaden, 1957
- Renou, L. Sur la notion de brāhman,
J. Asiat., 237, 1949, pp.7 ff
Religions of Ancient India, London, 1953
The Civilization in Ancient India, tr. from
the French by P. Spratt, Calcutta, 1954
Vedic India, tr. from the French by
P. Spratt, Calcutta, 1957
Études sur le vocabulaire du R̥gveda,
Pondicherry, 1958
- Risley, H.H. The People of India, 1908,
ed. W. Crooke, Calcutta, 1915
- Senart, E. Les Castes dans l'Inde, Paris, 1896.
Tr. into English by E. Denison Ross as
Caste in India; The Facts and the System,
London, 1930
- Shastri, Mangala Deva Bhāratīya Saṃskṛti kā vikāsa, Pt.1,
Vaidika dhārā, Banaras, 1956
- Shende, N.J. Religion and Philosophy of the Atharvaveda,
Poona, 1952
- Singh, F. The Vedic Etymology, Kota, 1952
- Singh, J.P. History of Indian Asceticism in pre-
Buddhist Times, Thesis for Ph.D.,
London University, 1960
- Spellman, J.W. The Legend of Devāpi,
in JRAS, 1959, pp.95 ff
- Srinivas, M.N. Caste in Modern India and other Essays,
Bombay, 1962

- Thieme, P. Brahman in ZDMG, 102, 1952, pp.91 ff
The Aryan Gods of the Mittani Treaties,
JAOS, 80, 1960, pp.301 ff
- Valavalkar, P.H. Hindu Social Institutions, London, 1939
- Wagle, N.K. Some Aspects of Indian Society as depicted
in the Pāṭī canon, Thesis for Ph.D.,
London University, 1964
- Weber, A. The History of Indian Literature, tr. from
the second German edition by J. Mann and
T. Zachariae, London, 1876,
6th ed., Varanasi, 1961
- Wheeler, M. The Indus Civilisation, supplementary
volume of The Cambridge History of India,
2nd ed., Cambridge, 1960
- Winternitz, M. Geschicthte der Indischen Litteratur, vol.I,
tr. into English by Mrs S. Ketkar,
Calcutta, 1927; vol.I, p.1,
(Introduction and Veda) 2nd ed.,
Calcutta, 1959
- Zaehner, R.C. At Sundry Times, London, 1958
Hinduism, London, 1962
- Zimmer, H. Altindisches Leben, Berlin, 1879